

## 1 A Sojourn on Midgard

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*And then he discovers Tony Stark.*

**This is set in the 1990s the MCU - from 1997-1999 - and Tony Stark is 27 when this begins. I took 1970 as his birth year, despite encountering some discrepancies online about this! Loki's theoretical birth year is when the Frost Giants invaded Midgard in 965 (as mentioned in Thor) but who the hell knows how they age/how Asgard's time lines up with Earth's. The hefty shifting around of timelines is for the Harry Potter world, with Harry's birth year shifting from 1980 to 1999, but the HP world is only very briefly mentioned in this story - the main story is WAY more concerned with that world.**

His brother is becoming unbearable. Since he had been gifted with Mjolnir, his arrogance and recklessness has known no bounds and Loki is growing tired of it. He has remained at Thor's side as is his duty as younger brother and has adventured and fought alongside the pompous oaf, but enough is enough. Loki has been on one too many *adventures* that have ended in injury or a near death experience for one of their party. He needs a break and that is what he is going to have. It is only a small matter of receiving permission from his father to travel the nearby Realms – Vanaheim and Alfheim, he says, when Odin asks (though he may venture a little further afield than that), with the aim of studying further. His father acquiesces to his wish, more distracted with watching Thor in the training grounds as usual. Loki has always known the best moments to request things of his father.

He spends the remainder of the day with his mother in her chambers, allowing her to fuss and fret over him as much as she wishes to. When she is done, he regales her with tales of his tricks around the court and she laughs freely and delightedly, even whilst attempting to scold him for his mischievous nature. When he rises to take his leave of her in the evening, she fixes him with a firm look and tells him to enjoy his studies and to bring her tales of the other realms. He knows by the glint in her eyes that she is wise to his intentions to explore beyond Vanaheim and Alfheim. She will not tell Odin of his plans, this he knows, but she wants him to be careful and to consider his options fully before making any decisions. He has never been rash before, nor does he think he will start being so now, but he appreciates her mother's worry. He kisses her forehead and embraces her tenderly in parting. He leaves early the following morning, by Bifrost for Vanaheim. He sees neither Odin nor Thor and briefly he wonders whether they will notice his absence. A small, bitter part of him thinks they would never notice if he were there or not, but he brushes that aside easily. Thor will miss him and his tricks in the dull Council meetings and Odin will miss their intellectual

conversations over family dinners. He regrets not saying farewell to them, but he is sure he will see them soon enough.

He is on Vanaheim only long enough to glean information from some of his more shady contacts as to the secret passages of Yggdrasil – specifically ones to Midgard. The information comes easily and at little cost; many of his contacts owe him a debt anyway. They tell him what they know and he finds his way to Midgard, girding himself with protective magic as he walks along the branches of Yggdrasil, exposed to the raw power of the World Tree. He steps out into bright sunshine and lush, verdant woodland and his first thought is that Midgard has not changed in the centuries since his last visit here – but then he hears the cacophony of unfamiliar sounds, roaring and beeping and grinding all around this little pasture. He glances upwards and sees buildings towering above him, all kinds of shapes and sizes and covered in glass. Midgard has grown indeed.

As he ventures further out into the wooded area he has arrived in, he conceals himself from the humans he initially sees. They walk hurriedly through, some seemingly talking to themselves or to strange, clunky devices held to their ears. Others, only a few, seem content to sit on wooden benches and commune with nature as they satiate their hunger and thirst. Humans are vastly different from how Loki remembers them. They are still the same in all the essentials, but from what little he has seen thus far their technology and understanding of the world they inhabit has apparently grown. Their manner of addressing each other is different – less formal – and they wear such strange garments unlike any Loki has ever seen with such vast variety.

He spends a few days in concealment, watching and following the humans about, learning small things to begin with – enough so he can blend in just a little. He learns that the vast city he has found himself in, with the tall buildings and ceaseless noise is called New York City and is part of the nation known as the United States of America. He learns of their different modes of transportation – cars, trains, buses, planes – and in his concealment even rides the subway to try to get the feel for it. It is noisy and chaotic and so different from the irritating serenity Asgard is oftentimes engulfed in and he *loves* it. He walks through a *mall* – a strange form of marketplace – and peruses the wide range of clothing humans now wear, easily distinguishing between the cheap and expensive items on offer. He is a prince, after all, and he knows quality when he sees it. He watches the humans pay with odd, small rectangles of parchment, or little bits of *plastic* and wonders at how much easier it seems than the Asgardian way of awkwardly carrying pouches filled with heavy gold coins. The humans, it seems, are all about ease and convenience.

When he feels confident enough in the basics, Loki finds a discreet alley to remove his concealment spell and takes a little time to transform his clothes. In short order his traditional, princely Asgardian leathers are gone, replaced by a pair of dark blue *jeans*, a white t-shirt and a leather jacket. It is rather simple, but effortlessly fashionable – from what Loki has gleaned in his short stay thus far; one cannot go wrong with tight-fitting jeans and a leather jacket.

Loki leaves the alleyway. He blends in with the crowds walking the streets of New York City effortlessly. With nimble fingers, he pickpockets a man at a crossing, relieving him of the interesting parchment money and one of those plastic cards before slipping the wallet back. Money, Loki has learned, is necessary on Midgard. Here he is not a prince and people will not defer to him as such and let him have what he wants for free. Neither does he have

Odin's vaults for any larger purchases he might wish to make. He must make his own way here – although this is not something he is stranger to. Sorcerer that he is, he often makes his own way. Brute force gets him nowhere fast.

With the strange plastic card, Loki buys himself a night in some upscale lodgings – a *hotel*, he learns is the word – and he signs for it all with the signature *Henry Mason*, the name on the card. The scrawl is not hard to mimic and Loki smiles charmingly at the woman at the desk as he confidently does so. He remains in the hotel for two nights before moving on. In his time at the hotel he has discovered *television* and something rather new called the *internet* and realises that acclimating to Midgardian culture may go smoother if he has access to either one of these (though he can tell that the internet is in its baby stages as an information resource and resolves to also find what might pass for a library in this realm).

As the months pass, Loki slowly establishes himself on Midgard. It is not too difficult for him to purchase a permanent place of residence – a rather nice apartment in a good neighbourhood suits him very well – though finding a way to exist *legally* is a little more of a challenge. Only a little though, for Loki has ample spells to convince people to do as he needs. Before long, he is Lucas Thornton, a British national (for apparently his accent in the Allspeak sounds British) currently on a long holiday in New York City. He changes his appearance too, so he need not continuously worry so much about Heimdall finding him should his shields slip. His dark hair transforms to short, auburn curls, his cheekbones soften just a little and he conceals his jawline with some light stubble. He keeps his eyes green though. He is loathe to part with that feature his mother has often called her favourite.

He spends his time in libraries, gleaning information from books about history and culture. He learns about the various political systems they have, comparing them to Asgard's monarchy and its hegemony over the Nine Realms (not that Midgard knows it). He acquaints himself with Midgard's economical system and the various kinds of law different countries operate under. He makes sure to acquaint himself well with the culture and history of Britain, should he ever find himself in a situation where he is tested on it, and spends a few weeks over there, experiencing it firsthand. He marvels at both the similarities and differences between New York and London, surprised that in such a small realm there is such variety. Asgard is the same everywhere.

He invests a little in the stock market and makes himself a modest amount of savings, deposited into a bank account from which he draws for his day to day living. In three months, he feels as though he is well set up to live as a human on Midgard for quite some time. He thinks it would be quite profitable to keep what he has created for himself as a bolt hole away from Asgard, should he ever need it. It would require frequent checking though, given that Midgard changes at a faster rate than Asgard. He would not be able to forget to check it, lest he suddenly find 500 years have passed. He settles (as much as the god of chaos ever can) and he foresees no near end to his sojourn on Midgard. He is away from his irritating brother, his aloof father and the snide court of Asgard. He has had no near death experiences since coming to Midgard, nor has he needed to rescue others from one. He is learning (one must *always* make an effort to learn, after all) and experiencing something so wholly different from the boredom of Asgard. Everything is good.

And then he discovers Tony Stark.

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Loki cannot remember what this ball is for. He knows it is a charitable institution that is conducting it, but his reasons for being here are not nearly so altruistic. Whilst he is a solitary creature and really has no wish to create relationships with the Midgardians he lives amongst, living beings (even one such as him) cannot go without social interaction indefinitely. Truth be told, a small part of him misses the duplicitous nature of Asgard's court. Any court occasion had been an excellent time for Loki to laugh at those around him. So many of the courtiers used those events as a way of ingratiating themselves with those of a higher class and of hindering those they saw as competition. Honour gave way to two-facedness and double-dealing under the table and Loki secretly revelled in the hypocrisy of it all. All of that intrigue Loki assumed would be found in any court, and these social occasions on Midgard were the closest to the Asgardian court he had found.

This is the third such event he has been to since arriving on Midgard and he has changed his appearance yet again. It allows him to move with ease amongst the others and to form no lasting impressions or attachments to any Midgardian who might attend more than one. Tonight he is brown-haired and clean shaven, shorter than his usual height and more stocky – though no less healthy. He is posing as Alexander Winters, the son of a minor noble in England, who has a slightly more than passing interest in the environment and clean energy. Loki is planning on putting his newfound understanding of Midgardian science (admittedly centuries behind the Asgardian equivalent, but the concepts are so old and the terminology so unfamiliar it had taken a bit of effort to understand it) to the test. He only hopes he can find someone to experiment on – someone with more brains than the airheads who had attached themselves to him at the last ball he attended.

He stands near the bar and nurses a whiskey (Midgard's alcohol is infinitely more varied than Asgard's and whiskey has quickly become his favourite), surveying the room thoughtfully. He tries not to sneer as he watches the superficial greetings and conversations taking place. It would take him very little time at all to spark an argument, or to orchestrate someone's downfall in this society, but he cannot be bothered. Tonight is turning out to be little more than a waste of time.

"Scotch, on the rocks," a voice demands from next to him. "Don't know why Obie makes me attend these things."

Loki glances sideways at the man next to him. He is short for a Midgardian man, with rich dark brown hair and a well-kept goatee. He taps absent-mindedly on the bar as he waits for his drink and is looking around disinterestedly until he catches Loki looking at him.

"Not having much fun either?" He asks Loki, with a small grin. Loki takes a sip of his drink and scans the room once more. *Ugh.*

"The vultures are out in full force tonight," the man comments, taking his drink and tipping the bartender. He turns around and stands next to Loki, observing the room with him. "I wonder how long it's going to be before those two get into a fight?"

Loki follows the man's pointed finger to where a rather rotund gentleman is ignoring his wife in favour of the buffet. He smirks.

“Not much longer, if her lover dares to approach her,” he replies, indicating a rather handsome gentleman watching the couple a few feet away. The man standing next to him laughs.

“Tony Stark,” he introduces himself, clearly expecting some kind of reaction. Loki merely shakes the man’s hand.

“Alexander Winters,” he replies. Tony looks a little surprised.

“Tony Stark? CEO of Stark Industries? Ring any bells?”

“Apologies Mr. Stark. Was I supposed to recognise you?” Loki quips. Tony puts on a hurt look.

“But I thought everyone knew my name,” he says mournfully.

“Ah, I am dreadfully sorry. I shall endeavour to make sure I know you the next time we meet,” Loki smirks into his drink as Tony chuckles. Loki’s evening suddenly looks brighter and he finds himself drawn into an intense conversation with Tony Stark (who despite expecting Loki to know who he was, says little to further introduce himself), who asks after Alexander Winters and his interests and they discuss the early beginnings of the hunt for clean, efficient energy sources. Tony’s intellect almost rivals Loki’s own and his understanding of Midgardian science supersedes Loki’s (though not to the extent that they cannot discuss scientific concepts). It is in short the most delightful evening Loki has spent on Midgard in the five months he has been here and he is sad to see it end when Tony’s chauffeur appears. Tony bids him goodbye with a haphazard suggestion of lunch, but sadly Loki already knows it won’t happen. He watches Tony go and a small, quiet longing for companionship – an equal, of sorts – begins to grow. He thinks Tony might be what he has been waiting for.

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When they meet in a coffee shop about two months later, purely by chance, Loki is – as has become his norm on Midgard – Lucas Thornton. He is reading *Les Misérables* in the original French and enjoying a cup of tea and Tony Stark’s arrival takes him completely by surprise. He has spent the last month concocting various ways of getting the man’s attention and then from there into his bed, but none of his disguises have worked beyond one night of pleasure. Tony’s interest has been little more than of a carnal nature. All of Loki’s preliminary research on the man showed this to be his *modus operandi* anyway. Tony Stark’s relationship with the tabloids and gossips rags is extensive indeed, and there are many articles detailing the situations the young Tony Stark has found himself in over the last several years. He does not even notice Tony until the man addresses him, asking after the enormous book in his hand. He has very presumptively taken the chair opposite Loki and is nonchalantly sipping from his takeaway cup of coffee. Loki hides himself behind his book and attempts an erudite comment about making the effort to read Hugo in French. He is off-balance by his unexpected encounter with Tony and is fighting to regain his equilibrium and mastery over the situation. It seems he’s not the only one who is thrown, though, for Tony too seems to be struggling slightly – his usual charm and sass gone as he rather obviously states that Loki doesn’t sound French. Their stilted conversation continues and Loki feeds

Tony Lucas Thornton's story about being a teacher in London but on extended vacation. Tony looks impressed and holds out his hand.

"Tony Stark," he offers. Loki attempts to look a little surprised as he sets down his cup of tea and accepts the handshake.

"Lucas Thornton," he replies, hoping this conversation will not end like the one with Alexander Winters. He isn't sure he could bear it. Fortunately, when Tony has to leave after about an hour's conversation – apparently he is ridiculously late for a meeting and incredibly unconcerned with this fact – he scribbles a number down on Loki's bookmark, saying it's his direct line.

"This was great. I want to do this again... which is weird. I never want to do *this* again. Never normally, that is. I actually want to do this again – this between us, right here. So... um... yeah. Call me and we'll talk and I'm shutting up now and leaving before Obie gets on my ass for being late again," Tony rambles. Loki smiles and shoos him away gently. Tony walks out the coffee shop and Loki watches him glance back twice before he leaves.

He waits a few days before calling Tony and he gets straight through to the man himself, whose voice is kind of obscured by the raucous music. After Tony struggles to hear Loki, several times, he relents and turns down the volume and they are able to converse normally. They talk for a little while – mostly about books and a little bit about science and politics, but the conversation is easygoing and relaxed and Loki feels himself warming to this human even more. Eventually they settle on meeting for coffee in the same coffee shop a couple of days later and hang up, Tony apparently being harassed for not attending yet another meeting. They have several coffee dates over the course of the next few weeks, neither one of them daring to mention what it is they're beginning to build between them. Loki can tell Tony is nervous and twitchy about labelling anything – he knows the human has been an advocate of very brief, lust-filled encounters and nothing deeper for the majority of his adult life thus far. Loki himself has had very few serious relationships (yes, he's a prince, but he's not *Thor*), despite his longer life span, so he understands the trepidation Tony is feeling.

Gradually their coffee dates become lunch dates and the places they meet go from run-of-the-mill to pricier-than-average to incredibly-fancy-and-don't-even-ask-the-price. Tony pays, of course, and Loki isn't allowed to suggest otherwise, or leave a tip. Their weekly extravagant lunch dates continue for about a month, until Tony suggests meeting on a weekend, and they go to a diner and the cinema. Mid-way through the action film they're viewing, Loki feels a hand curling around his own and he glances down briefly, considering Tony's hand entwined with his own. It's not a gesture used on Asgard – courtship rituals differ wildly between the two realms, Loki knows this and has taken care to learn Midgardian courtship rituals since whatever this is began with Tony. No, it's not Asgardian, but he likes it. It's sweet and understated and he turns slightly to look at Tony, who offers him a small, uncharacteristically shy smile in the darkness of the movie theatre. Loki smiles back and later that evening, when Tony drops Loki off at his apartment, they kiss for the first time. It's only brief, but like the handholding, it's understated and meaningful and leaves both of them staring at each other in quiet wonder. Loki thinks no one would ever believe him were he to tell them about this softer, gentler side to Tony Stark. He knows Tony is the manic, I-do-what-I-want-who-gives-a-shit billionaire for the public mostly – but Tony is that person in private sometimes

too. The chaos of it is part of who he is (though he does ham it up for the press) and Loki loves chaos – lives for it, even. But the sweeter side is one he relishes seeing because it is his and his alone.

They have a few more dates like that – on the quiet and under the radar where the press is unlikely to find them. But in the third month of their dating, Tony asks Loki to accompany him to a public event – a charity ball; Loki laughs to himself at the irony – and Loki agrees, knowing that this will mean the press and the public will know of their relationship. Loki knows it will be controversial – humans seem less open to relationships of this kind than Asgard – and that there is likely to be a large public outcry. From what he understands, Stark Industries is also likely to take a hit, as well as Tony's public image, so he knows what it really means for Tony to ask him this. He accepts and Tony favours him with a grin and an enthusiastic kiss, before immediately starting to arrange for a shopping trip. They venture through the malls, Tony disguised as much as he can be and eventually Loki is measured and fitted for an expensive tuxedo, the perfect complement to the one Tony is going to be wearing. From the way Tony is eying him whilst he is being measured, Loki easily guesses what's on the man's mind. Their eyes meet in the mirror Loki stands before and Loki smirks just a little. They're barely through the front door of Loki's apartment before Tony is on him. Their kissing is almost violent in its intensity and Loki has to remember to keep his strength checked lest he injure Tony and invite unwanted questions. The kissing progresses to groping and pulling off clothes and somehow they manage to stumble through to Loki's bedroom. They collapse naked on the bed together and are lost to carnal pleasures of which the like Loki has not known for a long time – even though he *has* been with Tony before. It is better for the relationship between them; he knows far more intimate things about Tony now than he did any of the previous times they were together. And now this human - his Tony - is remarkable in so many ways and Loki is lost to him; lost in him.

When they wake several hours later, it is only two hours until the ball they are supposed to be attending. Tony suggests they skip it in favour of more personal and pleasurable activities, but Loki convinces him otherwise. Tony reluctantly agrees and they travel to his penthouse apartment in order to prepare for the evening. They arrive at the event in Tony's limousine and Tony is the first to exit, to bright flashbulbs and shouts from the press. When he partially leans in to help Loki out of the limousine, they share a brief look and Loki takes a deep breath. How he feels is not dissimilar to how he felt before his coming of age ceremony on Asgard, centuries ago. He knows it will pass as the evening wears on and he gets used to the stares and attention. He expects it will be largely the same as any ceremony on Asgard - he will attract reluctant admiration from a few, but overwhelmingly the attention aimed in his direction will be disgust. He takes Tony's hand and steps from the limousine, discreetly smoothing the line of his tuxedo jacket as he does so. As he and Tony walk hand-in-hand down the red carpet to the building's entrance, the flashing intensifies and he can hear the shouts of surprise and the invasive questions from the press around them. They will be front page news no doubt. Tony pauses at the door, tugging on Loki's hand just a little, making him stop as well. Tony offers him a reassuring smile before leaning in to place a single peck on Loki's lips. Loki grins as Tony starts to move away, before yanking him back in for a longer, more passionate kiss. The flashes of the watching cameras go wild around them and the shouts crescendo into a roar.

"Think that's enough controversy for them?" Loki asks against Tony's lips just before he pulls away. They share another grin and a light peck before Tony gives the press a friendly wave and they enter the ball together.

All in all, it is a rather pleasant evening, even if the majority of people they talk to offer them falsely pleased greetings and the rest of them gossip behind their hands. When they are back in the limo at the end of the evening, they collapse into helpless giggles at the ridiculousness of the situation. The next morning, they are provided with a selection of tabloid newspapers and gossip magazines to peruse at their leisure as they enjoy a long morning in bed together. They laugh their way through the surprised, the shocked and the downright scathing tones of the various journalists. There are perhaps one or two who are supportive of 'Tony Stark's bravery', but the majority remains unsurprisingly narrow-minded, accusing Tony of lying to the world about his sexuality for years. Tony receives an irritated, mildly angry call from Obadiah Stane around noon, with the information that Stark Industries has taken a hit and a plea that Tony think about warning Obadiah when he's going to pull a stunt like this. Tony rolls his eyes for Loki's benefit and offers meaningless apologies to the man before cutting the call off and rolling across the bed towards Loki, his intent clear in his eyes.

In spite of Tony's desire to ignore the press at large, it has had an effect on his company, so he eventually consents to giving an interview on a talkshow - but only on one with a sympathetic host. Tony's appearance goes well - he introduces Loki (though Loki is not actually there), talks briefly about how they met, outs himself as an 'equal opportunities lover' (which has Loki snorting through his nose rather inelegantly as he laughs when they watch it back) - and in the following week, Stark Industries reveals some new military technology to the brass in the US Army and releases some medical technology to the hospitals across the country and the company is back on top form.

Of course, in the wake of all this, they've had to return to a more discreet form of dating and keeping a wary eye on their surroundings when they've been out and about has been necessary as well. Their next public appearance (at the premiere of the film *Titanic*; a film so horribly boring Loki allows Tony to *distract* him somewhat) is better than their first, but their relationship is still new to the press at large and still just as controversial. Loki is aware that Tony is shielding him from the worst of the public opinion (most notably, the outspoken, conservative, religious types who have sent threats of violence and death) which he, as Loki, needs no protecting from but *Lucas Thornton* is grateful for it. Their relationship ticks over quite nicely, then Loki realises that he should probably mention Lucas needing to go home to Britain.

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"Move in here," Tony suggests, almost as soon as Loki mentions his sabbatical coming to an end and his visa's expiration date. Tony looks unfazed and he makes his suggestion confidently.

"What? Tony, I have a job to return to," Loki replies. He is lying through his teeth to Tony and despite his moniker as the god of lies he hates it. He hates lying to Tony but it is necessary to keep the fiction of Lucas Thornton going. He wishes he could tell Tony the truth, but while Midgard has advanced far beyond what they were when Loki last visited, they are not ready for the knowledge of realms beyond their own.

"Sabbatical's time out, right? Time to re-evaluate. So don't go back. Give notice and stay here with me," Tony says simply. Loki's heart warms at the simplicity of Tony's want. Tony *wants* him to stay.



"What about my visa? What about working? I need money to afford living here, Tony," Loki lies. Tony remains unruffled.

"You don't need it, not if you're living with me. You won't need to pay rent or bills or whatever - you won't need a job, Lucas."

"I want to work, Tony. I won't be a kept man," Loki says adamantly. Even as a prince, he never allowed the servants to do everything for him. His independence has always been important. Tony relents a little.

"Look, we can work something out," he says, trying to placate Loki a little. "I just... I don't want you to go, Lucas. Yeah, sure, I can fly to London whenever I want, but I want you here, or in Malibu, or Oregon or any one of my houses - just... stay with me, okay?"

Loki looks at Tony for a little while. The man seems panicked, as though he thinks he's said way too much for his own comfort. Loki resists the urge to grin and laugh at his ridiculous human and instead offers him a small smile.

"Malibu sounds nice," he comments. Tony kisses him in relief and whisks him off to the bedroom.

Tony gets his lawyers onto Lucas Thornton's visa the next day, and while going to London is necessary for a short while, it is brief and when Loki returns to the US he does so with a visa that allows him to remain in the US indefinitely for the next five years. Loki gives up his flat and together they move from New York to Tony's self-designed mansion in Malibu. It is modern and beautiful and Loki's never seen anything quite like it. The Californian sun reminds him of Asgard and he enjoys the warmth immensely. He takes to sunning himself outside by the mansion's pool on the weekends whilst Tony lurks in his lab, inventing. Amongst various new weapons for the US Army defence contracts, Loki knows Tony is attempting to create an artificial intelligence to wire into the mansion. It takes up a lot of Tony's time, but Loki does not mind as his human creates something remarkable. JARVIS (Just A Rather Very Intelligent System) comes online three months after their move to Malibu and while he has a few kinks that Tony fixes with ease, their life becomes even easier than it had been. JARVIS is astute and intelligent and learns the preferences of his masters fast.

Loki finds work in the US, translating various works of literature from English into French and vice versa. He works as and when he chooses on a fairly freelance basis, so he is still able to spend significant amounts of time with Tony. They explore California together and venture over to the Caribbean once. He accompanies Tony on a couple of Stark Industries related trips to London and to Japan. They go to the public events - charity balls, premieres, etc - that Tony is required to attend to and their relationship becomes less of an excitement to the media - in fact, the press begin to comment on the longevity of their relationship, surprised that Tony Stark, notorious for his love 'em and leave 'em method, is committed. They laugh over the articles that comment on that, exchanging quiet *I love yous* in the dark of their bedroom.

They are deliriously happy together and Loki has almost forgotten Asgard and that he might ever need to return there. What more could he need beyond this human who challenges him intellectually and loves him so dearly? What more could he want?

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Towards the end of November, when they have been together for more than a year, Loki finds himself with his head over the toilet bowl, violently emptying his stomach of whatever remained in it from dinner the night before. He moans quietly and miserably to himself, hoping that Tony will not hear him. This has been happening for around a week now and unpleasant as it is, what Loki believes it may be makes him all at once excited and terrified. This has happened to him several times before so his experience is enough that he is confident without really needing to explore further, but he did not think this could happen with a human. Those of Midgard differ enough from the Aesir that Loki thought this impossible. He wipes his mouth with some wadded up toilet roll before running himself a glass of water from the tap. As he rinses his mouth and brushes his teeth, he refuses to think about the possibilities of the cause of his illness. He is unable to fall back asleep, so he ventures out of the bedroom and down into the main part of the mansion. He asks JARVIS to play him some soothing music and makes himself comfortable on the luxurious sofa. He dozes on and off for a couple of hours, any dreams fragmented and unnerving. He is woken by Tony, who looks down at him, concerned.

“You alright, babe? Lucas?” He asks gently. Loki makes an effort to smile as he sits up slowly. His stomach churns a little and he wills it to stop. He doesn’t want Tony to know yet – if at all. He needs time alone to make that decision, though he thinks he already knows what it will be.

“I’m fine. Just wasn’t sleeping well. Don’t know why,” he lies. Tony looks less worried, but he leans down and presses a tender kiss to the top of Loki’s head before offering coffee. Loki accepts eagerly, hoping it might shake him from his part drowsy, part worried state but his stomach churns at the thought and he changes his mind.

“On second thoughts, I think I’ll have orange juice instead. Too warm for coffee,” he tries with a grin. Tony shoots him a worried glance but shrugs and heads in the direction of the kitchen. Loki asks JARVIS to turn off the music before following Tony through. While Tony gets the coffee machine going, Loki makes a start on pancakes for the two of them, flipping them with a learned excellence. During his time here in Midgard, he has mastered many a task that he had never thought he would need to do. He is now proficient in cooking a wide variety of meals, much to Tony’s delight. If Loki were unable to cook, he thinks they would be eating take out every day and that Tony would be far less healthy than he is now. As he flips the pancakes, Tony comes up behind him and presses a kiss to his shoulder.

“So, I was thinking that after my really boring totally necessary and irritating meeting today that we could head out to the New York penthouse for the next week. You know – do some shopping, see the sights, etcetera. It’s been a while since we’ve just had some time,” Tony suggests. Loki leans back into Tony as he plates up the pancake he’s been flipping.

“The idea has merit. You are certain R&D can spare your time?”

“Hey, I’ve just completed six designs *and* had them patented. The board of directors will sign off on them this afternoon and then they’ll go into production. Pretty sure they can spare me for a week,” Tony comments with a cheeky grin. Loki passes him a plate and the syrup. He looks at his own and his stomach lurches. He just doesn’t think he can eat right now, not if he doesn’t want it coming back while Tony’s around. Instead, he putters around

the kitchen while Tony rambles and eats, doing little things to keep himself distracted and busy so Tony doesn't realize he's not eating. He puts it off as long as he can, but thankfully by the time he's resigning himself to plating up his own pancakes and forcing himself to eat them, Tony is heading out of the kitchen with an apology and a promise that he'll be back by lunch. He leaves the mansion with a delighted shout of *New York, baby!* Loki scrapes his pancakes into the bin.

He slowly makes himself vaguely presentable before daring to leave the mansion. He needs to be alone and without JARVIS's all-seeing nature recording what he's going to do. At first he walks a fair way down the beach until he is far enough from the mansion's cameras before teleporting away to a fairly secluded park that he knows is nearby. In amongst the trees, it is quiet and peaceful and Loki is alone. He sits down on the ground and crosses his legs, before closing his eyes and turning his sight inwards. He follows the core of his magic down through his body until it branches out where it doesn't normally. This particular thread is rather active and glowing more than the others and he follows it along to where it seems to end. A new magical core is growing there, slowly and Loki's earlier assumptions are proved right.

He spends the next week in tortured indecision about what he should do and hoping that Tony doesn't notice as they travel around New York City like tourists. He thinks his acting ability is good enough that his distraction isn't noticed, but occasionally Tony gives him strange looks. When he's asked if he's alright, Loki lies superbly (he is the god of lies, after all) and Tony seems satisfied in the interim. It is December now and the Midgardian Yule festival, *Christmas*, is rapidly approaching. The shops are heaving as they walk through, disguised. Tony buys Loki a couple of frivolous trinkets and Loki reciprocates in kind, but his heart is breaking. He lies awake at night, next to Tony in their bed in the penthouse, thinking of what he has to do.

He cannot tell Tony. Midgard is not yet ready for knowledge of other realms and the beings that inhabit them. Their understanding of science would make it all too far-fetched and even Tony, who is so far ahead of his time, would struggle to believe the truth of who Loki was and where he is from, never mind the fact that he – a man – is pregnant. That is just the simple beginning of why Loki cannot tell Tony.

Asgard. Odin. The Prophecy of Ragnarok and the End of the Gods. He knows what Odin intends for any children he ever has. Sleipnir's servitude is a good example of that. Hel cast out, Jormungand and Fenrir's imprisonment, Narvi and Vali's deaths – all of them suffering or dead because of Odin's decrees. This child, the one growing within him even now, must be protected from that. Loki will not lose another child to the Allfather and some *prophecy* that is little more than superstition. He could leave the child with Tony, of course, but that would require he tell Tony the truth, and he cannot be sure that even with his disguises and tricks, that Odin or Heimdall have not seen him here. He has been away from Asgard long enough that they might have searched for him and he worries that they may have found him. No, he must leave Tony, as much as it will break his heart to do so. He must give up the child to a safer place where he or she will be lovingly cared for and away from Odin's vain intentions. He has to leave. There is no other choice.

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*My dearest Tony,*

*My heart is breaking as I write this. I cannot explain. Some things are far too complicated for mere words to give them light. I wish I could tell you, but I fear even your understanding and comprehension would be tested unto incredulity.*

*These last eighteen months have been precious to me. Never would I have imagined that I could meet someone like you – someone so intelligent, so witty, so thoughtful, so generous and so loving. Our time together has been so full of joy for me – something I realize I have had surprisingly little of before I met you.*

*But all things must come to an end – though some more prematurely than hoped for. You are the very best of men, Anthony Stark – better than I, for I am choosing the coward's way out – and I would not change any of our time together for anything in all the realms.*

*Don't look for me – I know you will, but I'm asking anyway. Don't look; you won't find me so don't torment yourself so.*

*I know I am making myself the villain here and villains are undeserving of charity, but please, I beg you, remember the better times and keep those in your heart. Please, just know that I am sorry. I am sorry, dear heart.*

*I love you.*

*Lucas*

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After the baby is born and Loki has left him the care of the Midgardian Wizarding couple, he conceals himself and teleports back to New York. The penthouse is startlingly empty. A few paintings are missing from the walls and several pieces of furniture have been replaced, but essentially it is as it always was. Not finding what he wished to in New York, Loki teleports from there to Malibu and remains concealed as he appears in the mansion. It is dark for the middle of the day – the glass windows are darkened and where there are curtains, they are drawn tightly shut. There are empty bottles for a variety of different alcoholic drinks strewn about the kitchen. When he descends to the lab, it is devoid of life. DUM-E and U and Butterfingers are powered down and the lab itself is a mess. Again, more empty bottles. Screwed up paper decorates the surfaces and floors. There is smashed glass and other detritus across the floor and Loki thinks he sees drops of dried blood but he is uncertain. His heart aches and he heads for the last place he will look.

As he silently enters the bedroom, he notes the trail of discarded clothing and in the bed he sees two figures. One is a woman, unfamiliar to Loki – blonde and curvaceous with a pretty face – and she is naked beneath the silk sheets. Next to her lies Tony. He is sleeping, but fitfully and he looks unhappy. There are new stress lines in his forehead and around his eyes and Loki's heart breaks just a little bit more. He moves closer to the bed, casting a mild sleeping charm on the woman as he kneels at Tony's side. His hand trembles as he reaches out and gently cups Tony's cheek. He slowly, carefully and intricately weaves a powerful spell of protection around the man before leaning even closer and pressing a tender, loving kiss to Tony's lips. He stills as Tony stirs briefly, but the man falls back asleep easily.

"I am sorry, dear heart," he whispers, eyes blurring from tears. "I love you."

As he moves to stand, something catches his eye and he turns to look at the bedside table. Sticking out of the top drawer is the crumpled corner of a letter. Loki's curiosity gets the better of him – Tony despises paper and writing; *computers do it better, Lucas* – and he carefully opens the drawer and extracts the letter. It's the one he left for Tony eight months ago. It's crumpled and torn a little at the edges. It's been taped back together at least once – there's sellotape holding it together – but Loki can still clearly read his own words. He slips it back into the drawer without reading it, taking care to leave it as he found it. With one last glance at Tony, he teleports away.

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If he had expected Asgard to herald his return with a feast, he would have been disappointed. All he receives are a few bland greetings from Sif and the Warriors Three, a 'welcome home, Prince Loki' from his few regular servants. His father inquires after his trip with a knowing look in his eye, which Loki avoids, giving his mother his attention as she asks whether his studies were profitable. He answers in the affirmative, saying he learned much in his time away and is well rested and ready to return to his courtly duties. When he reaches his rooms, Thor is waiting for him and gives him a warm, tight embrace which engulfs Loki. He takes a little bit of solace in Thor's warm welcome, acknowledging that perhaps he missed Thor, after all. Thor, along with their mother, is the most effusive in welcoming him home and Loki appreciates it. He is heartsore from the events that have passed on Midgard and in great need of support, even though he can never tell them why.

The next few years pass as they always do on Asgard, with hunts and minor skirmishes, daily weapons training and court intrigues, studies on kingship and ruling and more magical arts, diplomatic visits from other realms. Loki remains bereft, but it is now a dull ache, only sharpening when he dares to look in on Midgard, searching out Tony, where ever he might be. He sees parties and drinking and women and more inventions and Tony seems happy, though Loki can tell he's not. He doesn't dare risk checking on their son. Whilst he doesn't think Odin knows of Tony and all that passed on Midgard, he doesn't want to risk the chance of Odin finding their son. He simply trusts that the Potters are taking good care of him.

He tries to put them out of his mind. But then it is announced that Thor is to be made king soon and his brother becomes unbearably arrogant once more. Asgard is full of celebrations and cheer for the soon-to-be-king and Loki seethes for the lies his father told them both, when it is suddenly clear to Loki that all this time, only Thor was ever going to be made king. He longs to run away; to run for Midgard and find Tony again – to find their son and become a family, but it is impossible. His duty is to stay on Asgard and welcome the new king, supporting him as any loyal brother and subject should. He cannot help but think that Thor's arrogance and stupidity will ruin Asgard though. Thor, rule? It is a ridiculous notion and he needs set things right. Maybe once all is set right, he will be king and Odin's decrees about his children will no longer matter. Maybe Loki will be able to bring his children home. Maybe he will be able to finally meet Hávarðr. Maybe he will be able to tell Tony. He dares to hope.

He shows the pathway to the Frost Giants.

## 2 Lokijarson (Matronymic)

**This is set post-Thor: The Dark World, beginning in around June 2014 Harry was born in 1999, and this begins at the end of his fourth year. Tony Stark is 44 (I use 1970 as his birth year),**

*Once the last crack has sounded, Harry realises he is now alone in the graveyard with Loki – with the man not only claiming to be a god, but Harry’s father also. Harry stays still, watching as Loki turns slowly and he finally gets to see the man’s face.*

## **Chapter 1: On Triwizard Tasks and the Deflection of Unforgiveables**

*I’m going to kill you, Harry Potter. I’m going to destroy you. After tonight, no one will ever again question my powers. After tonight, if they speak of you they’ll speak only of how you begged for death. And I, being a merciful lord, obliged.*

His body is aching. Voldemort’s calm, measured words ring in Harry’s ears over and over as he holds his wand with both hands, struggling to keep his footing. The blinding lights of the conjoined spells keeps him from seeing Voldemort, but he can hear the wizard shouting at his Death Eaters. The sickly, bright green of the *Avada Kedavra* gets closer, the red of the *Expelliarmus* fading as Harry strains with all his might, fighting for his life even as he feels his magic weakening the longer he keeps the spell up. Voldemort stands opposite him, sure and confident, laughing victoriously already. Harry pants heavily, feeling sweat beading on his brow from the exertion and he is sure this is it. This is it. After all, he may have defeated Voldemort as a baby, but now his mother’s protection is null and void – *thank you very much, Wormtail* – and Voldemort is back in human form and at full strength. Harry really has no chance now. Still, he holds on for all he is worth, thinking of his family, his friends, Hogwarts. He has to try, for them and for his parents’ sake.

“He is mine!” Voldemort shouts triumphantly. “The *Boy Who Lived* will be no more!”

Harry groans under the strain of the spells locked together and knows he can hold it no longer. His *Expelliarmus* is almost non-existent now. He closes his eyes in preparation for the world beyond this one when suddenly he feels his feet leave the ground and he is flying through the air. He lands several feet from where he had been standing just a few short moments ago and his body screams in pain from the impact and from the *crucio* Voldemort had hit him with earlier. Eyes flying open, he scans the graveyard desperately, wondering why he is still alive and what on earth interrupted the duel. The Death Eaters are prone, scattered around the graves, some unconscious, some groaning in pain. Voldemort is struggling onto his knees, breathing heavily. Between Harry and Voldemort, a newcomer stands with his back to Harry. He is tall – taller than Voldemort, Harry sees – and dressed strangely even amongst wizards. He is dressed in black and green leathers and heavy leather boots. Decorated, gold vambraces cover his forearms and there is another armoured gold plate on one of his shoulders. His leather coat seems to move with the wind even though the night air is still. Harry thinks he is dressed for combat – is used to it even. His stance seems all at once both relaxed and alert, all of his senses almost *disinterestedly* honed on the environment around him.

Across the other side of the graveyard, Voldemort snarls and lifts his wand in a rage.

“*Avada Kedavra!*” He snaps. The spell shoots from the tip of his gnarled wand in the direction of the man and Harry shouts a warning but the man simply lifts a pale hand and

*catches* it. The spell coalesces as a ball of green light in his hand and for a moment the man appears to play with it. It disperses seconds later with a dismissive wave of his hand. A low chuckle fills the graveyard.

“You truly think your spells will affect me? Hm,” the man sounds as though he’s smirking. “I suppose, however, that I should expect no better from a mortal wizard.”

Voldemort looks affronted – although really, Harry thinks, *affronted* is a rather mild word to describe the expression on the other wizard’s face. Enraged, Voldemort lifts his wand again.

“I am no mere mortal wizard, you insolent worm! I am the all-powerful Lord Voldemort and I am immortal! *Crucio!*”

Again, the man simply catches the spell and holds it in his hand. He looks at it and moments later it splits and shoots from his hand towards some of the more recovered, bolder Death Eaters who had been rather stupidly sneaking up from the side. The Death Eaters in question do not dodge in time, but fall to the ground shrieking in pain.

“I rather doubt your assertion, *Tom Riddle*,” the man comments. “I know many wizards, warlocks, sorcerers, and others, all of whom have far greater power than you.”

“And who might these be? I would have their names so I can prove you wrong.”

The man sighs and appears to brush lint from his shoulder.

“Midgardians. Always so egotistical and over-reaching their own capabilities. Always so ignorant and lacking in true knowledge,” he muses.

*Midgardians?* Harry’s brow furrows in confusion over the strange term. He’s pretty sure now that this man is no wizard – he’s not even sure that he’s human.

“You clearly know not with whom you speak! Such insolence will be punished!” Voldemort hisses. Having seen the man deflect two Unforgivables, Harry isn’t sure that Voldemort can make good on his threat.

“You have not even asked with whom you speak, so such an assertion on your part is pointless and foolish,” the man says, clearly amused. Whoever he is, Harry hopes the reveal is going to cause Voldemort and his Death Eaters no small amount of embarrassment.

“Reveal yourself then, if you think yourself above me,” Voldemort snaps, his tone mockingly benevolent. “Though I warn you now, I have no equal.”

“Are you sure you would not rather... *pontificate* a little longer? I was rather enjoying myself, I must say,” the man admits. Voldemort lifts his wand and looks ready to scream a rather nasty spell, so the man sighs and concedes.

“Very well, if I must,” he says. There is a moment’s pause as the man is suddenly bathed in a greenish-gold glow and his outfit changes slightly. A rich green cape now falls from his shoulders to the ground, obscuring his full attire from Harry’s point of view, but it is the man’s helmet that catches Harry’s attention. It is gold, shining brightly and reminds Harry of

a Roman Centurion's helmet, save for the top. Instead of the tall, red plumage typical of the Romans, two graceful horns sprout from the front of the helmet's crown, curving back over the man's head, each sharpening into a pointed tip. He looks regal and intimidating – and Harry can only see his back. The man adjusts his stance and Harry sees him plant the butt of a long, gold spear with a wicked looking point into the ground.

"I am Loki of Asgard," he announces proudly and confidently. Harry hears a few of the Death Eaters inhale sharply at the words. One or two even take a few steps back. Voldemort looks a little nervous for a moment, but his rage is too powerful and instead he begins to shoot a myriad of spells at Loki, clearly sick of the diversion from his original plans for the evening. Loki however alternately catches the spells Voldemort throws at him or deflects them with his spear, not moving from the spot in which he first appeared. After a while he appears to have had enough and moves his right hand in a brief, sweeping motion towards Voldemort. A sudden flash of green light startles Harry and he initially thinks that Voldemort may have just been killed, but instead the other wizard appears to be bound and wandless. Loki approaches him slowly, spear now held in both hands. He carefully makes sure to step firmly on Voldemort's wand and there is a sharp cracking and splintering sound. Voldemort looks outraged and opens his mouth to speak but fails when Loki lifts his hand once more.

"Do all Midgardians lack manners? You did not allow me to finish my introduction. I am Loki of Asgard and that boy you dared to touch and to harm is my son, Hávarðr," he continues. "I have often been told that I must have infinite patience from putting up with Thor for centuries but now I find my patience worn thin, Riddle."

"The *boy* cannot be your son. He is the spawn of James and Lily Potter and I will defeat him this night," Voldemort spits. Loki moves so quickly Harry is uncertain that he moves at all, but the proof is the blood that drips slowly from the tip of his spear and the long, oozing cut down Voldemort's right cheek.

*His son?* What is this Loki talking about? Harry's parents are James and Lily Potter, as Voldemort said! Harry thinks about interrupting, but decides now is not the best time. He is reckless, yes, but not stupid.

"You will not touch what is mine, *mortal*. You spoke of insolence, Riddle? I am a god and I will not tolerate insolence such as yours. You have dared to touch what is mine and now you will reap the consequences," Loki murmurs. Harry can hear the tightly controlled fury in Loki's tone and shifts where he is, wand in hand and ready to run should he need to.

"You, Riddle, have been courting my attention for a long while now. Playing with magic in the way you have been, slaughtering other users of magic. Magic is a gift – one which you were given but have tainted. And then to touch my Hávarðr – *my son* – well... I see no choice but to remove that which you were given."

Voldemort screams. It is an agonising scream, one that has Harry flinching back against the gravestone he is standing next to. He is not sure what Loki is doing to Voldemort, but there is a green glow surrounding his right hand where it is touching Voldemort's face and it looks as though something – something foul and dark with the consistency of slime – is oozing from Voldemort's skin and dripping to the ground beneath. The oozing does not last long



and as Voldemort's scream dies away, Loki drops the wizard to the ground. Voldemort is on his knees before Loki, shivering and cowed.

"It is said of me that I am the god of Chaos, Mischief and of Lies. What is not known nor said is that I am the greatest sorcerer in the Nine Realms. To challenge me and claim omnipotence was the act of a fool," Loki says, moving backwards a little. He plants the butt of his spear in the ground once more. "For your crimes against magic, I have removed your gift for it. For your crimes against Hávarðr..."

The spear vanishes in a glimmer of green-gold and from where he is standing Harry cannot see what happens but he hears the ring of steel and the sickly, squelching sound of a wound. Voldemort slumps to the ground, motionless. Harry holds his breath for a moment, wondering if this is it, if Voldemort is truly dead and by the hands of someone who is claiming to be Harry's *father*. It is a strange sense of breathless hope mingling with terror that fills him as Loki lifts his gaze to the Death Eaters around him. A few of them drop to their knees in fear and respect. Loki seems to survey them for a moment.

"Get out of my sight," Loki sneers and none of them linger long after that, apparating away almost instantly. Once the last *crack* has sounded, Harry realises he is now alone in the graveyard with Loki – with the man not only claiming to be a *god*, but Harry's *father* also. Harry stays still, watching as Loki turns slowly and he finally gets to see the man's face.

The likeness is uncanny. Black hair – check. High cheekbones – check. Ethereal green eyes – check.

Loki's eyes are glowing initially, but as Harry watches they dim a little. A smile quirks thin lips and with a wave of his hand, Loki's cape, helmet and spear vanish. Harry supposes he is trying to seem less intimidating, but after what he's just seen the man do to Voldemort, he isn't sure that vanishing a few accessories is really going to help all that much.

*"You have grown, Hávarðr. So much. The last time I saw you, you were but a babe in arms. I have missed you, my son."*

Harry swallows. Loki speaks gently and with the warmth of love in his tone, but Harry is confused and nervous and not quite sure what is going on.

"I'm sorry – really I am – but I don't know what you're talking about," he replies nervously. Loki smiles sadly and moves closer. He stops only a little way from Harry.

*"Of course you don't. You were not even an hour old when I was forced to give you up. And here you are, almost full grown and learning your craft."*

"James and Lily Potter are my parents," Harry points out, even as he looks over Loki's features once more, recognising the similarities between them. *"You cannot be my father."*

Loki laughs and this time it is far more pleasant than the sinister chuckle Harry had heard earlier. This one is light and airy and carries warmth in its sound.

*“Take me to them and they will tell you of the night I came to them, pleading for them to take care of you in my place. I am not your father and although I carried you, I was not in a position then to truly be your mother.”*

Harry starts at Loki’s words. He does not know that James and Lily Potter are dead, murdered by the madman Loki himself just killed? And what was that about being Harry’s mother?!

*“My parents – James and Lily – they were murdered by Voldemort when I was a baby. My aunt and uncle raised me,”* Harry says softly. Loki’s eyes widen in grief and horror and he moves closer, one hand reaching for Harry, but not quite making contact.

*“I am sorry, Hávarðr.”*

*“It’s fine. But what was that about being my mother? Which isn’t biologically possible, is it? You’re a man! And if you’re my mother, who was my father? And I’m still not sure I believe you!”*

Loki laughs again.

*“You have many questions, Hávarðr. And your command of the Elderspeak is commendable, given you have lived on Midgard your whole life.”*

*“Elderspeak? I’m not speaking English?”*

*“You are not. The Elderspeak is the native tongue of the Aesir and it is a gift, whispered into your ear as a babe, mere minutes after birth. My use of the Elderspeak triggered your own command of the language.”*

*“Oh. Can we speak English? I’m finding this all really weird right now,”* Harry asks. He feels far too calm. He thinks he should possibly be a little more than worked up given he’s just seen a friend killed, Voldemort resurrected then killed *again*, and been told that his parents are not his parents - all that, and he’s only worried about speaking in another language? *What the hell?*

Loki gives him an indulgent smile.

*“Of course, Hávarðr.”*

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When Harry makes it back to Hogwarts, clutching Cedric’s dead body to him, he is too shellshocked from the evening’s events to offer much of an explanation for the professors and Tournament officials. Minister Fudge immediately takes a dislike to what little information he can glean from Harry’s few words and as Professor Dumbledore is dragging him inside and away from the cacophony, Harry spots Fudge talking with several Aurors and glancing at Harry from time to time, a strange combination of suspicion and fear on his face. Even in his hazy, stunned state, Harry knows that whatever Fudge is saying to the Aurors, it’s not good.

Dumbledore drags Harry all the way to his office behind the griffin statue, Professors Snape and McGonagall following at a fast pace. Harry manages to stutter out an explanation which is truthful up until Loki revealing who he was and why he was there, but cannot bring himself to reveal the full truth - and perhaps that is his downfall. Instead, Harry just says that a wizard he did not recognise apparated in, duelled with Voldemort and killed the Dark Lord. Snape's testimony about his Dark Mark coming to life once more, the pain of the summoning and then its fading confirms Harry's half-truths enough for Dumbledore to be seemingly convinced.

Cornelius Fudge and the Ministry of Magic? Not so much. They arrest Harry two hours later for the murder of Cedric Diggory and as Harry is led from the castle, watched by what seems to be the whole school, he wonders where his *mother* vanished off to. The god had left the graveyard after ensuring Harry could return to school, saying that there was something he had to do, to prepare, before he would return for Harry properly. Harry hadn't been sure then if he wanted to go with Loki, or even if he believed him yet, but now he was wishing Loki had taken him along. If he had, then Harry wouldn't be in this position right now.

Harry is taken to the Ministry holding cells where he is to await trial. He has no visitors whilst he is stuck there and is allowed no letters. Clearly they all think him guilty, even if Dumbledore, Snape and McGonagall initially believed him. He curls up in the corner of his cell with the moth-eaten blanket they've provided for him and the events of that evening rush through his head. The adrenaline as he ran through the maze, grabbing the cup *with* Cedric, landing in the graveyard and then that flash of horrific green light, blasting Cedric off his feet and stealing the life from his body. Harry shudders with the force of that particular memory, before forcing himself to think onwards, past the rebirth ritual to the arrival of Loki.

Loki, who is either a madman or a god or both and who claims to be Harry's *mother* - that James and Lily Potter are not his real parents, but merely adoptive ones. Harry has no idea what to think. He has no idea what to believe. Loki saved him from Voldemort - *defeated* Voldemort - and all because Voldemort had *dared* to attack Harry. But why hadn't Loki appeared before now? Harry has faced Voldemort numerous times before now, and has been in a myriad of other dangerous situations and yet Loki has never shown up before.

Harry wishes Loki would arrive now and steal him away from this cell, from this fickle world who can't decide whether Harry is to be admired or vilified. He feels so incredibly lost at sea and out of place. Not even Ron and Hermione have come to visit him and for so long they have made him feel at home and at ease at least a little within the Wizarding World. So long as it suits - *suites* - them, Harry supposes. He chastises himself for his bitter thoughts; they are his best friends, after all - perhaps they have not been allowed to visit, just as he has not been allowed letters. That must be it, he is sure of it.

He eats the meagre offering of food that is shoved through the flap in the bottom of the cell door and drinks all the water they allow him. The guards taunt him with the rumours from the *Daily Prophet* and suggestions for what his fate will be. *Dementors*, they say, *that's what's fit for a murderer like him*. Harry doesn't waste his breath protesting for much longer than the first day. He learns quickly that protesting his innocence and trying to defend himself will only earn himself more mockery and serve to convince them of his guilt. So he stays quiet and calm, nothing like the brash Gryffindor everyone has always assumed is his natural state of mind.

Instead he thinks of Loki, apparently his *mother*, and tries to remember anything and everything he knows of Norse mythology beyond Thor being the god of thunder. All he can remember of Loki is a vague story he was told in primary school about a god's lips being sewn together after a bet gone wrong, but he isn't sure of the truth of that. The man – *god* – he saw seemed far too at ease and in control to ever allow something to go wrong – especially something that would lead to a consequence as awful as having his lips sewn shut. But then again, things happen and even for the most well laid plans, things can go wrong.

Loki had explained very briefly to Harry exactly *how* it was that a man was his mother. It is something Harry isn't particularly keen on remembering, however, considering it the fact that it could very well happen to him one day, should he not be as careful as he needs to be. Apparently Loki is of a race where all of them are intersexed and some of them are shape-shifters. Loki had apparently seduced a man and ended up pregnant, even though he was male at the time.

And thus Loki carried and birthed Harry – *Hávarðr* is his birth name – in secret and passed him onto the Potters, unable to care for the infant himself.

Harry didn't quite manage to get the *why* out of Loki, but he did understand that Loki was very much distraught at having to give his baby away. It warms Harry a little to know that. For once, it feels as though someone wants him and wants him simply because he is Harry, and not the Boy-Who-Lived.

Still, apparently not enough to rescue him from this cell and eventually the Dementors.

He curls up tighter in the corner and discreetly wipes the tears from his eyes. He focuses on his breathing as Remus had taught him once in response to a panic attack he'd caught Harry having. He slows his breathing down and it calms him, steering his thoughts away from Dementors and the soul-less state that awaited him. His eyes begin to droop and sleep beckons and he is nodding off when a noise startles him awake.

"*Hávarðr!*" A voice hisses. Harry glances up quickly. There is only one who would call him that, his apparent birth name. Sure enough, Loki stands in the centre of Harry's cell, glowing greenish gold around the edges as he reaches out a pale, long-fingered hand.

"*Come, Hávarðr,*" he whispers. "*We must leave and get you to safety.*"

Harry eyes the hand suspiciously for a moment before remembering that going with Loki – who claims he is Harry's *real* mother – is far preferable to having his soul sucked out by the Dementors. Tentatively, Harry places his hand in Loki's and then the world blurs.

## **Chapter 2: On Shapeshifting and Ragnarok**

**This chapter is set in the past, before the ending of A Sojourn on Midgard, and before Loki arrives back on Asgard after his time with Tony. In case you haven't guessed - this means angst. Lots of angst.**

The night air was cool around her as she hurried onwards, fearful of what or whom might be following her. She had shielded her presence as best she could at this present moment, but she was uncertain how long it could hold – not whilst she was in this... condition... at

least. Being pregnant was playing havoc with her magic and her emotional state was not helping either. As much as she tried to be calm and cool headed, it was nigh on impossible sometimes. She dropped a hand to her belly and caressed it lightly for a moment before retracting it as though she was burned by the movement. Even in her emotional state, she knew could not afford the sentimentality her hormones were driving her to. She needed to remain distant. She needed to remain distant but it was increasingly difficult to do so as the pregnancy progressed.

She pulled the hood of her cloak further over her face once more and swiped at the stray tears on her cheeks. The house she sought was only a little further along and hopefully she would make it there at a decent hour, whilst the residents were still awake. She had watched them for a while now and their habits implied that they would still be awake, but she did not want to be impolite or rude, not when she needed them on her side immediately. It was one of the reasons she had carefully shifted from her male form to the one she currently wore. Appearing as a helpless, pregnant woman would have them on her side far more quickly than appearing as a pregnant man. A pregnant man would only arouse fear and suspicion in this mortal world, where such a thing was not possible. Still, the shift had worked, despite the dangers to the baby the use of such intense and invasive magic held.

She rounded the corner and paused for a moment. The house was really a cottage and she would call it quaint rather than pretty as she had heard it described the locals. Still, it was safe and secure and nothing like the grand halls she herself had grown up in and so no one would expect this to be the place she chose – a quaint cottage in an innocuous village, on a lesser realm. She carried on, up the garden path until she stood before the front door. With a nervous, trembling hand, she knocked, gently at first, then louder when there seemed to be no response. Eventually the door swung open and she was greeted by a handsome young man who looked barely twenty.

“Sirius, I swear- Oh. Hello. Sorry, I thought you might have been someone else. Um. Can I help?” He asked. He was young and awkward and strangely charming and she could see kindness in his eyes. Yes, she thought. He would be perfect.

“Please – I am being followed and I cannot be found. I seek shelter. Would you be willing–?”

“James, is it Sirius? You tell that flea-bitten- James, for Merlin’s sake, let her in! She looks terrified and freezing!” Another voice interrupted. A redheaded woman appeared in the doorway, pushing the man to one side and pulling the terrified, hunted woman inside the porch. “Come on, we’ll get you some tea and you can tell us what’s going on.”

“Thank you. Thank you so much!” She whispered. The woman, so perceptive, so gentle yet clearly capable of standing her ground - she would be perfect, too. Tears gathered in her eyes at the thought of them together. Her hand dropped to her belly again, as if to give reassurance, but she removed it quickly. Sentiment was clouding her judgement once more. They were perfect, but they had yet to accept - they did not even know what she wanted. She had to make her case clearly and effectively and she needed a clear head in order to make sure this turned out the way she wanted it to. She had to convince them of her need and to help her with it. It was the only option.

A short while later, she is sat by a roaring fire in their front room, her fingers wrapped around a warm cup of tea and a blanket across her shoulders. Opposite her, on the sofa, James and the redheaded woman - she'd introduced herself as Lily - sat watching, also holding cups of tea. Tea seemed to be a cure-all, here on Midgard, she mused to herself as she sipped from her cup. Across from her, James cleared his throat to get her attention and as she looked up, Lily elbowed him in the side and shot him a quick glare. They were clearly worried and wanted to know who she was and why she was there and she supposed she should not delay any longer. It was time to allay those fears with the truth – and she did mean the truth.

“My name is Loki,” she began, setting her tea to one side. “And I come from another realm much different from this one, known as Asgard.”

“Asgard?” James scoffed. “Asgard is only myth, as are Yggdrasil and the Nine Realms and the entire pantheon of Norse gods. You cannot seriously be suggesting-”

Lily shushed him with a frown on her face and gestured for Loki to continue.

“I was aware that Midgardian wizards once upheld and revered us and did so longer than those Midgardians without magic, but I did not expect any to still remember the tales even as myths,” Loki commented, strangely surprised at James’ response. “Still, we are not myths but do truly live in Asgard as you do here on Midgard. Occasionally we might visit this realm, though not as much as the other realms, I will admit. I had expected something much more... primitive upon my arrival here.”

“Primitive!” James exclaimed.

“But you are here now because...?” Lily asked quickly, partly out of interest, but mostly to stop her hot-headed husband from continuing, Loki noted. Loki smiled sadly.

“I came to Midgard, perhaps two of your years ago, purely out of curiosity for how Midgard had grown in the centuries since I had last visited. Whilst here, I met a man – an extraordinary man – and I spent six months courting him in many of my different forms, until I felt secure enough in one of them to think he might consider pursuing something more than a single night of pleasure,” Loki paused, feeling wistful. Those early days had been like a whirlwind and rife with pleasure and indulgence and all manner of delicious and lewd behaviour. It had been physically satisfying, but had not sated Loki’s craving for companionship on a deeper, more emotional level.

“When you say ‘forms’, do you mean like an animagus form?” James looked incredibly confused and more than a little revolted and Loki rolled her eyes.

“Nothing nearly so sickening, mortal. I am a shapeshifter and as such can change my features to resemble any human characteristics I wish. In my natural form I am a man—”

“I thought something was off,” James muttered. “The only Loki I remember from the tales my grandparents told me was definitely not a woman.”

Lily pinched her husband on the leg and he scowled. Unperturbed, Loki took a sip of her tea and continued.

“In a different form to the one you see before you, I shared much time with him. Around eighteen months, I think, the longest of any of his relationships. We were happy, truly so very happy. But my pregnancy was a surprise to me. I did not think I could have children with a Midgardian, but apparently we are compatible. However, to admit to my lover that I, a man, was pregnant would not have been received well. Not only that, but I have relatives in Asgard who would not see me have children – any more than I already have - for fear of Ragnarok coming upon us. I cannot bear the thought of terminating this pregnancy, nor would I have my child suffer whatever fate Odin devises, therefore he or she must remain secret,” Loki stopped once more, swallowing hard against the raw emotions that clawed inside her and blinking back the tears that pooled in her eyes. She opened her mouth to speak once more, but found she could not. *Sentiment.*

She brought a hand to her eyes and covered them, all the while trembling with the force of her emotions. A gentle hand on her knee forced her to open her eyes. Lily Potter knelt before her, compassion and kindness in her expression. James Potter’s hand fell on her shoulder and squeezed reassuringly. She expected words of sympathy, but what came out of his mouth was wholly unexpected.

“We’ll do it,” he said quietly. Loki could have cried in relief.

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Loki spent the next six months with the Potters, intermittently to start with, but more consistently as she drew nearer to her due date. Her baby moved restlessly inside her, filling her with thoughts of the father, as far as he was from her. He didn’t know anything about their baby, neither had she mentioned to him that she was leaving. She had just up and left him, almost as soon as she had realised she was pregnant. All she had left behind was a brief letter containing everything she would never say in anyone else’s presence. It was cowardly and the guilt of how she had left him consumed her at times. She wished she could have comforted him. She wished she had used her magic to stay and watch him from the shadows as he woke and discovered her gone, but she knew she would not be able to bear it. To see his grief and heartbreak when she felt her own keenly would be too much. Perhaps it she should have forced herself to do so as punishment for her cruelty in leaving him, but this was all about what was best for their baby. Their baby had to be protected and if that meant leaving - leaving without looking back and without remorse - and taking the babe to a couple who were so wholly disconnected to everything she and the father were associated with, then so be it.

From watching them, she had known that James and Lily Potter had been longing and trying for a child of their own with no success. They would certainly care for Loki’s unreservedly. The fact they were Wizardkind only further cemented them in Loki’s mind as perfect guardians for her baby. They would nurture the natural, inherent magic in the babe, as Loki would have done herself, had she been able to be the mother she longed to be. It may not be taught in precisely the same way Loki would, but the babe’s magic would not be forgotten or ignored. This would be her seventh child and the seventh she could not mother as she wished to, due mostly to Odin and his fear of awakening Ragnarok. But this one, at least, she had the opportunity to give a normal life. Hopefully this babe’s life would be void of the tragedy that had befallen the others.

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On a stormy evening at the end of July, Loki struggled and strained as she brought the babe into the world. James Potter held her hand and wiped the sweat from Loki's brow gently as Lily, training as a Midgardian Wizarding Healer, guided Loki through the birth as best she knew how. Despite the others Loki had given birth to, this was the hardest and the longest. She felt as though her insides were being torn apart and feared that the baby might be a creature like the serpent, or the wolf, or even the horse. But through the haze of fear and pain, she heard the most beautiful cry as her baby slipped free between her legs. Within seconds, Lily had placed the baby on Loki's chest and she brought trembling hands up to hold him. Him. A son. She and her mortal lover had created a son, a beautiful baby boy to learn science and magic and be the best of the both of them, but without ever knowing them. Loki, usually so careful with her emotions and usually so despising of sentiment, clutched her baby boy to her and wept.

"Hávarðr," she murmured eventually. "Will you let me name him that?"

James and Lily Potter, who had been standing at a distance, allowing Loki time with her son, moved closer. Lily smiled sadly at Loki, unable to even contemplate doing what this woman – this god – was about to do.

"Of course you can name him," she whispered. "He is yours."

"And you will let me do the Asgardian birthing rites? They will not take long, I promise, and then I will hand him over to you. He is your child."

"Loki," Lily interrupted gently. "He is *yours*. Do what you need to."

Loki nodded gratefully and laid a trembling hand on the baby's head. It glowed with the green of her magic and he stilled, calm and peaceful with its familiarity.

"My son," she said. Her voice was stronger than it had been moments ago, though still full of emotion. "My son, you shall be the best of me and the best of your father. May you grow strong in magic and science and may you ever truly know you are loved and were born from love. On this your birthing day, I name you Hávarðr Anthony Lokijarson."

She traced a protection rune on his forehead and a gentle wisp of magic left her fingertips and surrounded Hávarðr before it seemed to seep into his skin. He was suffused with a warm gold-green glow for a few minutes before it dimmed. Leaning down, she began to whisper to him, tales of Yggdrasil and the Nine Realms, of Asgard and Midgard, the Elderspeak flowing from her and into him. She spoke for around half an hour, before closing her eyes and breathing deeply. Opening them once more, Loki tenderly kissed her son on the head. He stared up at her with already vibrant green eyes and she struggled to tear her gaze away, instead beckoning James and Lily close. When they stood at her bedside, she passed Hávarðr over to Lily carefully and with no small amount of trembling. As Lily's arms encompassed the baby, Loki pulled away quickly, eyes focusing elsewhere - anywhere but Hávarðr. She wiped the tears from her face with furious, angry movements and James and Lily did not speak as she composed herself, instead waiting for Loki to be ready to speak further.

"Thank you for allowing me to observe Asgardian tradition with the naming rite and allowing me to gift him with the Elderspeak," she began, sliding out of the bed on the other side. "But you need not worry about the Elderspeak being a problem. He will speak with your



Midgardian tongue unless another should talk to him with Elderspeak.” She stood on trembling legs and Lily frowned in consternation, opening her mouth to speak, but Loki glowed goldish-green and with a sigh stood straight and tall and healthy once more, no evidence of the fatigue of birth in her body or her face. She still looked torn and emotionally distraught, however. Nothing could hide that.

“Hávarðr is yours now. You may name him as you wish, or keep the name I have gifted him – whatever would seem normal so not to arouse suspicion from your friends and fellow workers. After all, it would not do to waste all those months of your simulated pregnancy, dear Lily,” Loki gave a small, sad smile as she slowly began to transform the nightgown she wore. Another moment and Loki was no longer a woman, but a man, tall and intimidating in black leathers and golden armour. He fiddled distractedly with his vambraces before turning to look at James, Lily and the baby. He smirked at their slightly stunned stares before moving swiftly to join them once more. Clasp ing one hand across his breast, he gave a short bow.

“I thank you, most humbly and from the bottom of my heart, for your help and hospitality during this time,” he began, his voice strong and without any hint of the devastation he was feeling. Lily reached out to him.

“Loki–”

“I wish you both and your son many years of health and happiness,” Loki’s voice cracked on the last word and he took a deep breath to steady himself. “I will take my leave of you now, for I must return to Asgard.”

“Visit him? Please!” Lily pleaded as Loki turned away. He paused and glanced back. His green eyes were filled with pain and sorrow and Lily felt breathless just seeing the intensity of it. She moved forwards to try and grasp his hand but he avoided her with ease.

“To do so would be to put him in danger. I cannot. *I must not*,” he said quietly. “Do not tempt me, please. I will take my leave.”

James and Lily blinked and Loki was gone.

### **Chapter 3: On Nightmares and Hairstyles**

Harry sleeps peacefully, bundled under many layers to try to keep the lingering chill from the ministry cells at bay. He is lying in a large bed, which takes up most of the second bedroom in this small apartment of Loki’s. The curtains are open just enough to let a sliver of moonlight through and the light cuts across the bed so Loki can see Harry as he sleeps. The stress lines Loki had noticed earlier have eased now Harry rests, but Loki can tell that Harry has been through more than simple stress. He looks more than a little undernourished – nothing like the strong build of either of his parents. He is not stocky like his father, nor lithe like Loki. He is skinny, almost unhealthily so. Whatever happened once James and Lily had died was not good and when Loki ousts it all from his son, retribution on those responsible will be swift. A mother’s anger burns in him. It always has, but now may be the first opportunity he has ever had to act on it. For now though, his son needs him, but he will not stay his hand for long.

The moonlight shows a curious mark on Harry's forehead, exposed by his dark, messy hair falling to one side. Loki moves closer and as he peers at it, he scowls in disgust when he realises that not only is it a scar, but it is shaped like a lightning bolt. Forcibly reminded of Thor, he sighs irritably.

"Will you ever not follow me, brother?" He murmurs distractedly, as he notices a strange magic lingering around the scar. It is a tainted magic and Loki immediately turns his mind to the mortal wizard who would have set himself up as a god. Pushing gently at the magic, Loki feels its resistance. It pushes back at him, black and horrid and snarling in its defence. He pushes a little harder and finds his own magic almost sucked in to a pool of wretchedness beyond what he felt on that barren rock in the cosmos. He pulls his magic back quickly and bites his lip as he stares at the scar. He does not know what it is, but it is not something he wants in his son, attached to his son's magical core. His son is vulnerable right now; his magic is beginning to change as he grows from a boy into an adult. Anything as black as this would severely damage Harry's magic - and possibly also his psyche. Whatever it is, it needs to be removed, Loki is sure of that. But it is not something he can deal with while Harry sleeps, at the very least, he will need Harry to be conscious and to allow him to investigate - otherwise it would prove very painful for his son and that is the last thing Loki wants. It reeks of malevolence and darkness and Loki wants to wake Harry to deal with it now, but he knows that Harry needs to sleep. He can tell that his son has been resisting sleep for quite some time now - probably the duration of his stay in those cells - and he needs to recover.

Loki sits on the side of the bed Harry is lying in and reaches out tentatively to gently caress his son's face. After a moment, Harry nuzzles into the warmth of Loki's touch, instinctively rolling his body towards the god. Loki smiles and leans down to brush a tender kiss to his son's forehead before standing up once more. He retreats to the living room of the apartment and paces for a while, wondering what he should do next. He has reclaimed his son after fourteen long years, saving him from what looked like death at the hands of that mortal madman, and seeing Harry again makes Loki long for his son's father, but that is a desire he cannot give in to. There are too many complications there - too many to count and Loki will neither risk himself nor his son - especially not his son.

No, their lives will be lived from here on out within the bounds of peace and obscurity. Asgard's watch has been dealt with - there is no threat from that quarter. They are free - free to dwell amongst the mortals and live as the mortals do, as long as they do nothing that would arouse suspicion from the Midgardian authorities. There are many in this realm who would be delighted to catch Loki - and Harry also - and so Loki thinks that the best way he can care for his son right now, is to leave Chaos and Mischief behind - for a while, at least. Odin and Heimdall pose no risk, but he does not want that mortal Fury and his band of miscreants to find them. Neither does he want the Wizarding population of Midgard to find his son. From what little information he has been able to glean thus far, they have not been good to Harry, so Loki is resolved that they will have no further part in his son's life. He will teach his son magic now and there will no longer be any need for such foolishness as a *wand*. By the Norns, what a terrible belief, that magic had need of a wand as a conduit. Loki will teach his son *correctly* and will be able to teach him far more than the mortal wizards ever could.

Loki is jolted from his thoughts by a toe-curling scream coming from the second bedroom of the apartment. Immediately he ceases pacing and dashes for Harry's bedroom. He halts in the entranceway for a moment, clinging to the doorframe and watching as Harry screams in

his sleep; screams of such fear and horror that it breaks Loki's heart. What has happened to his son to cause him to have dreams such as this one? What has he seen and been subjected to if his night terrors are thus?

Loki is sat on the bed by Harry's head in an instant, reaching out to pull his son into the circle of his arms. Harry struggles to begin with, thrashing and pulling away from Loki, but the god begins to murmur comforting words in the Elderspeak, whispering words of safety and security that his mother used to tell him when he was young. Harry's screaming and struggling slows and eventually comes to an end, but he still moves restlessly for a while, even as Loki strokes a gentle hand through his unruly hair. With a long, slow shudder Harry finally awakes, eyes immediately fixing on Loki. Their gazes lock for a moment and Loki is unsure how Harry will react, but he keeps up his gentle motions and waits for the fight or flight instinct to leave Harry's taut body. When Harry finally relaxes with a great sigh, Loki smiles at him, but does not move away.

*"Peace, Hávarðr,"* he murmurs. *"I will not let your night terrors overtake you. You are safe here."*

Harry eyes Loki warily and Loki wonders how long it will be before Harry starts to trust him. Loki knows Harry still doesn't quite believe that Loki is his mother. It is too different from what Harry has known for his whole life for him to simply believe it immediately. Loki never expected immediate acceptance anyway, he simply wanted a chance to be some form of a parent to one of his children. He will take it how it comes and will adapt as Harry does, though he expects a long journey for the both of them.

*"Here? Where are we?"* Harry asks, slipping unaware into the Elderspeak. Loki will not dissuade him from using it, after all it has lain dormant for fourteen years and Harry will need the practise.

*"We are at my apartment in the city of New York. It is safe, I assure you. None you do not want to find you will be able to. My wards and protections are quite strong,"* Loki explains. He conjures a glass of water into one of his hands and offers it to Harry. Harry sits up slowly and eyes it warily for a moment before accepting it and taking a tentative sip.

*"Thanks. Um... are we speaking that weird language again?"*

*"The Elderspeak, Hávarðr. We are indeed."*

*"Please can we speak English?"* Harry pleads, after drinking some more of his water.

"Very well. While I am not quite sure I understand your aversion to your mothertongue, I am aware that finding out your parents were not who you thought they were is rather a dramatic change to undergo, so I will concede to your Midgardian English," Loki takes the glass back from Harry once it has been drained and vanishes it with a sweep of his hand. He does his best to ignore his own memories of such an event when they pull and tug at his attention. This is *not* about him. This is about Harry and he will not allow it to be otherwise. Thinking on his own family situation will only serve to make him angry and distraught anyway. Loki refocuses his attention on Harry.

“Do you wish to tell me of your night terror, Hávarðr?” He asks gently. Harry looks down at his hands and is silent for a few moments. Loki waits patiently, knowing the answer he expects is coming.

“It was just a dream. I’m fine,” Harry says, looking up but not meeting Loki’s eyes. Loki allows him the lie and doesn’t call him on it. If he were in Harry’s position, he would not reveal his nightmares to a complete stranger either.

“Alright. However, if you do ever wish to speak of your night terrors, I will always listen, Hávarðr,” Loki stands slowly and leans down to kiss Harry lightly on the forehead. “You may sleep more if you wish. Alternatively, I am open to starting dinner slightly early. I shall only be in the living area if you have need of me.”

He smiles when Harry calls after him, his voice quivering with nervousness.

“Dinner would be nice, please.”

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Harry watches Loki go and once the door closes behind the god, he lets out a deep breath and allows himself to give into the sobs that he has been holding back. This time his nightmare had consisted of Cedric’s death, his mother’s – *Lily Potter’s* – dying scream and his friends and the Dementor’s Kiss that he had been heading for, waiting in that cell at the Ministry. He shakes and cries into his pillow, tears of grief and fear and frustration and confusion. Within half an hour in a graveyard, his entire life had changed and now he needs to figure out what exactly is going on – what is left for him, even. Clearly he can’t ever return to Wizarding Britain. They would have him in Azkaban facing the Dementor’s Kiss quicker than he could catch a snitch - especially after this jailbreak.

And what is left for him there anyway? Certainly not his friends, who likely all think he is guilty of murdering Cedric Diggory. Hogwarts? He is not sure he wants to return there, not with the new memories this last year has given him *on top* of the previous three and if he isn’t all human – *if Loki is actually his mother after all, it makes him half alien! What the hell?! –* then perhaps whatever human magic is being taught will eventually not work for him? He has seen Loki do wandless magic as if it were as easy as breathing several times since he met the god. Maybe the god can teach him that? Harry doesn’t have his wand anyway. It was confiscated as evidence by the Ministry of Magic and Harry doesn’t think Loki will have paused to pick it up whilst freeing Harry.

Loki is strange. Harry is not sure yet how to react to the god who claims to have birthed him and given him up to two humans. It is a fantastical story, really – a god visiting earth out of curiosity, seducing a human who had caught his eye, ending up pregnant. It is almost like something out of one of Molly Weasley’s over-the-top, cheesy romance novels. As for being a Norse god? Harry knew that the Wizarding World placed some importance on Norse mythology, but he hadn’t particularly listened to the whys and wherefores during that particular History of Magic lesson when Binns had inexplicably deviated from droning on about the goblin wars (not that he had listened in any, really) so his knowledge is very rudimentary and limited.

He hadn't really thought they existed either, until Loki had appeared and crushed Voldemort so thoroughly and with so much ease. The other Death Eaters had seemed almost afraid and in awe of him, though clearly glad to be allowed to flee once Loki had been done with Voldemort. They obviously knew more about Loki and the Norse pantheon compared to Harry's knowledge. Harry briefly wishes for Hermione – she would know all the answers to his questions – but then remembers that neither she nor Ron came to visit him in the Ministry cell, that they both have abandoned him. He instead considers asking Loki. What harm can it do after all? The man – *god* – is claiming to be Harry's mother. Surely he will answer some simple questions?

Harry rolls out of bed slowly and tries to make himself presentable. He is dressed in a pair of comfortable pyjamas that Loki must have put on him (the thought makes Harry shift uneasily) and looking in the full length mirror on the wall, he can see that his hair is sticking up in every direction possible. He scowls for a moment and tries to flatten it, but his efforts have little effect and he doesn't even have his wand to try a hair-taming charm either. With a sigh, he runs one last hand through it, gives up and heads for the door. The room beyond is rather light and sunny, with large windows along one wall, showing the impressive New York skyline he had only ever seen glimpses of on the Dursley's TV (when they weren't aware, naturally) and the sun sinking slowly on the horizon. Harry marvels at it for a moment before his attention is drawn by the rest of the room. It is decorated in earthy tones, with tasteful greens and browns being the predominant colours. There is a large leather corner sofa opposite the wall with the windows and a glass coffee table just in front of it. Across the other side of the room to where Harry is hovering in the doorway, it expands into an open-plan kitchen area with a breakfast bar.

Loki is standing in the kitchen, focussed on chopping some kind of vegetable, a frying pan sizzling away on the hob next to him. Harry thinks he smells onions frying and it lures him across the room, reminding him of his hunger and the fact he hasn't eaten a proper meal since before the final task of the Triwizard Tournament. He seats himself on one of the stools at the breakfast bar and watches. Loki clearly senses him there immediately and turns to offer Harry a small smile. After a moment, it grows into a larger one, followed by a mischievous chuckle and Harry frowns.

"What?" He asks. Loki smirks at him and shakes his head.

"Your hair, Hávarðr, is a mess," he points out, gesturing with the small chopping knife he holds. Harry self-consciously tries to flatten his hair *yet again*.

"I can't help it. It just does that," he protests, eventually giving up once more.

"Your father's hair was almost exactly the same – at least until he used a rather excessive amount of lotions and potions to get it to conform the way he preferred," Loki comments. His smile turns wistful for a moment and Harry gets the impression that Loki misses whoever Harry's father is. That's if Harry believes this story. Still, Loki hasn't mentioned the mysterious *father* much and Harry wants to know as much as he can, to see if he can glean any truth from any of it at all.

"My father? You haven't mentioned him much at all," Harry says quietly. "Will you tell me about him, please? I know barely anything about you, and you've said almost nothing about

him. If you want me to believe all of this, you have to tell me stuff. How am I supposed to know you're not a crazy wizard kidnapper or something?"

Loki puts down the knife and turns to lean against the countertop. He raises an eyebrow, clearly amused by something.

*"Your inherent - albeit rusty - command of the Elderspeak is not enough proof of there being truth in my words?"* Loki questions. Harry notices how he avoids the crazy wizard kidnapper accusation. He thinks he would too, if he was accused of that.

*"It helps, yes, but I want to know about my father,"* Harry insists.

"You are aware you just spoke the Elderspeak again, yes?"

"Damn it!"

Loki laughs and folds his arms across his chest. He thinks for a moment before sighing.

"Your father is a remarkable man, for a Midgardian," he begins. "He drew my attention, which was a feat in itself, as I believed at that point that all Midgardians were curious creatures, but beneath me and not worth my time. He was captivating – handsome, charming, witty, intelligent – enough to keep me on my toes, even. I first met him at a charity event and spent a short while in conversation with him there. While nothing occurred that night, it was meeting him then that inspired me to pursue him," Loki pauses and looks away briefly, stirring the frying vegetables listlessly. Harry can see he is considering his words carefully.

"I am a shapeshifter, Hávarðr. I can make myself appear in whatever form I so choose – animal or human. I took advantage of that skill to meet your father repeatedly, as different men and women. I sparred verbally with him, danced with him, drank with him. I spent many nights with him, all in different forms, until I met him by accident, in the form I had been using day-to-day on Midgard. There was nothing special about the form - it was made to blend in and not to stand out, but he noticed me. He noticed me and went out of his way to spend time with me."

Harry frowns and opens his mouth to speak, before closing it again. This story isn't the whirlwind romance he was expecting Loki to tell. It feels far more real than that, given that his apparent father appears to be a playboy of some kind, if Loki had to change shape so often to spend time with him. Harry feels slightly disgusted with this unnamed, apparent father of his.

"I remained in that form and with him as his lover for eighteen months – the longest of his relationships, I do believe," Loki continues.

"What happened?" Harry asks, hoping his father isn't some utter bastard who abandoned his pregnant partner. Loki smiles sadly and moves across to the breakfast bar. He touches a gentle, affectionate hand to the nape of Harry's neck.

"I became with child – with you, Hávarðr. I had not expected it, nor had I even thought it possible that I would be able to have children with a Midgardian, but you were there. Growing inside of me," Loki murmurs.

“So he abandoned you then?” Harry asks, angrily. He is far more emotionally involved in this story than he ever intended on being - he had simply wanted to gather information - but all of it so far feels like truth. Harry can feel it in his bones. It is the strangest sensation, but he is sure that Loki – *his mother* – is telling the truth. And the thought of a father who abandoned Loki - who abandoned *both* of them? It is far more real than the hallowed legend of James Potter that Hogwarts taught him. It feels far more real and far more devastating.

“Hush, Hávarðr. He did not abandon me. Things are far more complicated than you think,” Loki says gently. He moves away from the breakfast bar and opens one of the kitchen cupboards. Harry watches as Loki retrieves two glasses and fills them with water from the tap, clearly thinking as he does so. One of the glasses Loki hands to Harry, the other he keeps for himself. Once he has resumed his previous position of leaning against the other counter, he takes a drink and resumes his story.

“I ran, Hávarðr. I was a man at the time and on Midgard, men do not fall pregnant. But it was not only that which caused me to run. Various prophecies have been given in Asgard over the centuries, prophecies that my children would bring Ragnarok – the great battle to end the age. Odin Allfather has since taken precautionary measures against my other children to prevent Ragnarok from coming. He would see any children I have either killed or chained up and I could not allow that to happen again. So I left your father. I left him and I travelled Midgard, concealed from the Allfather’s and Heimdall’s sight, looking for a safe place to have you and a couple with whom I could leave you – the Potters.”

“So he doesn’t know about me?” Harry asks. He is confused and hurt and yet at the same time warmed by the actions Loki took to protect him.

“He does not. It was too dangerous. There was too much of a risk that the Allfather and Heimdall had seen me with your father, so leaving you with him was not possible. Nor could I take you back to Asgard for whatever fate Odin would devise for you. I could not stay on Midgard either, for they would eventually come looking for me and drag me and you back to Asgard. I would not have it, not then and not now,” Loki says vehemently. Harry thinks he understands what Loki has told him, but there are some things that just don’t make sense.

“So why now? What about Odin? Who even *is* Odin?” Who is he that he can threaten Loki, (apparently) the greatest sorcerer in the Nine Realms (whatever they are)? And surely Loki wouldn’t take a risk now that he wouldn’t fourteen years ago? What has changed that means he can be with Harry now? Loki smirks just a little and Harry feels slightly worried by that reaction.

“Odin is the King of Asgard and Ruler of the Nine Realms. He also happens to be my adoptive father. He is, however.... shall we say, *incapacitated*, at present,” Loki reveals with a grin. “As for why now, I felt the danger you were in and came to rescue you. I have the runes of your name marked on my body and they alert me to when you are in mortal danger – that is how I knew.”

Harry lets that digest for a moment – that even though Loki could not raise Harry himself, he was never completely disconnected. Harry knows there are some flaws and gaps in Loki’s explanations, but he is tired and emotionally wrung out, so he leaves his questions for now. Although there is one thing that Loki hasn’t told him yet.

“My father – what was his name?” Harry asks cautiously. Loki sighs deeply and unhappily.

“You were named for him, Hávarðr. While your first name is one of Aesir influence, your second is Midgardian and was the one he was given as a babe,” Loki explains. He’s dodging answering the question, Harry can tell, although he is not lying.

“So where did Harry James come from then? Was that my father’s name?” He asks, knowing he is wrong. He is hoping to lure the answer out of Loki by frustrating him. The god seems possessive and Harry cannot imagine Loki allowing him to believe untruths for too long a period of time, especially when they deny Harry’s true parentage.

“That is the name your foster parents gifted you with. When I performed the naming rite not long after I birthed you, you were gifted the name Hávarðr Anthony Lokijarson. That is your true name,” Loki admits with a pained smile. *Hávarðr Anthony Lokijarson*. Harry rolls the name over and over in his head, mouthing it to himself as Loki turns back to cooking dinner. The sounds of the name hum in his ear and thrum within him like the beat of his pulse. It settles into his bones and feels *right*. He shifts uneasily, unnerved by the feeling of *rightness* and *homecoming* that has his magic purring beneath his skin.

He remains seated at the breakfast bar and distracts himself by pondering over his conversation with Loki. It hurts to know that he was given up, but the reasons ring true. As he cooks, Loki keeps darting glances over at Harry, and Harry can see the concern and worry in Loki’s eyes. He avoids meeting them, instead looking at his hands as he thinks about Odin. Odin, who by rights is Harry’s adoptive grandfather, but Loki had said that he has hurt all of Loki’s other children. (Harry’s not touching that one right now; he can’t contemplate *siblings* on top everything else.) If Odin really is that terrible as to harm his own *grandchildren*, Harry cannot imagine what could have become of him had Loki not given him away. He does not know enough about Asgard to figure out what kind of punishment Odin would have had in store, but it sounded like it would have been nothing good - or Loki’s would have his other children with him. By giving him away, Loki had protected him and Harry is grateful for that. He needs to let Loki know.

Focusing, Harry attempts to find that strange taste that the Elderspeak leaves in his mouth. After a short while, and no small amount of difficulty, he speak.

“*Thank you*,” he says softly. Loki pauses in his cooking and turns around to stare at Harry.

“What did you say?” He asks.

“*Thank you*,” Harry repeats. He shifts nervously, hoping that Loki will understand. He focuses again and hopes he doesn’t accidentally say something stupid. “*Thank you for keeping me safe and rescuing me now.*”

“*You are welcome, Hávarðr*,” Loki answers with a smile. “*Did you know you are—?*”

“*Yes. I... um... I wanted to.*”

Loki’s face lights up with a proud smile and their conversation continues in a much lighter vein (though back in English). They eat together and Loki asks Harry about the adventures he has had in his short life. Harry dives in with some of the less life-threatening ones from



Hogwarts (no basilisks or werewolves here, nope, not at all) and some of them have Loki in stitches at the mischief Harry managed with his friends. Eventually Harry takes himself off to bed, leaving Loki on the huge sofa with a thick book on his lap. As he crawls under the covers, his thoughts turn again to Loki's tale, this time fixing on the prized bit of information he gleaned. His father's name was *Anthony*.

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When he's sure that Harry is asleep, Loki sets the protective wards around his apartment. He shapeshifts into a man not too different from his natural appearance and changes his clothes before heading out. He double checks the wards and spells before teleporting across the city, confident that Harry is safe in the apartment on his own. His destination is a bar that looks rather seedy from the outside, but has a rather long and rowdy queue waiting to enter. Confidently, Loki walks straight past the queue and to the doorman, who, after a discreet flick of Loki's fingers and a wisp of greenish-gold, lets him in with a smile and a nod. Loki tips him generously before ducking in through the door.

The bass is loud and vibrates through the stairs and he can hear the loud noise of drunken Midgardians partying the night away. As he reaches the lower level, he scans the room quickly before his eyes land on the person he is looking for. Loki glides effortlessly through the crowds, ignoring the appreciative looks and deftly dodging the bolder hands that make grabbing motions towards him. His target is sitting at the bar, slumped over a beer, looking rather dejected and alone. Loki slides onto the seat next to the man and attracts the bartender's attention.

"Scotch on the rocks, please," he orders smoothly. The barman nods and sets about getting Loki's order. The man slumped over his beer looks in Loki's direction, before shrugging and turning back to his beer.

"Thought you were someone else, for a moment," the man murmurs. Loki shifts on the bar stool so he is facing the man. *Oh, is he a glutton for punishment.*

"Oh? I must have one of those voices," he says lightly, somehow successfully keeping the emotion from his voice. The man shrugs and Loki knows this has the potential to be really hard work, so perhaps blunt honesty would work particularly well in this circumstance. Maybe vulgarity too, to attract the man's attention. Well, it *had* worked before, all those years ago.

"I want you to fuck me," Loki says abruptly. The man jolts and almost spills his beer, turning eyes wide open to Loki that almost immediately look him over appraisingly. Loki takes a sip of his scotch and smirks behind the rim of his glass, his eyes never leaving the other man's face.

"And I thought I was forward," the man muses with an appreciative smirk; he is far more alert now.

“I do what I want and I get what I want,” Loki responds. “Sometimes being straightforward to the point of vulgarity is the simplest method.”

The man chuckles and the humour makes his eyes light up in a way they haven’t since Loki first laid eyes on him this evening. He looks far more alive now – far more alive and far more like the man Loki had fallen in love with all those years ago. His dark hair is wild and unruly from where he’s run his hands through it repeatedly and his beard is as neatly trimmed as it ever was. As Loki moves closer, he starts to smell the underlying scent of motor oil beneath expensive cologne and it feels like coming home.

“Tom Larssen,” he introduces himself, leaning in and ghosting a kiss across the other man’s slightly chapped lips. The other man places a confident hand on the back of Loki’s neck and draws him down for another, longer, *dirtier* kiss.

“Tony Stark, but you already knew that, right Tom?”

## **Chapter 4: On Eavesdropping and Letters**

When Loki disentangles himself from arms and legs and soft cotton sheets, it is not quite as quiet as he had hoped. His companion shifts on the other side of the bed, rolling over and opening his eyes. They focus on Loki almost immediately and a smug, sleepy smile spreads across the man’s face. Loki ignores it with no small amount of difficulty as he pulls on his jeans and sits on the edge of the bed with his back to the other man in order to pull on his shoes. With Tony sleepy and sated just behind him, teasing grin on his lips, Loki is finding his role rather hard to play. He needs to be dismissive and uncaring - the very opposite of what he wants to do right now. He wishes, heart aching with the absolute *desperation* of that wish, that he could curl up in Tony’s arms, tell him about their beautiful, wonderful son and that they could live together as a family, unhindered and without thought to Asgard or the Wizards of Midgard, or the Midgardian authorities who would no doubt want Loki dead... He finishes lacing his boots, eyes burning with unshed tears. He furiously blinks them back.

“You off somewhere, babe?” Tony asks; voice a little husky from sleep. Loki hears and then feels him shift closer, the warmth from Tony’s body pressing against Loki’s back enticingly. He almost allows Tony to lure him back into bed, but he has left Harry alone and asleep and he wants to be back before his son wakes. He never regrets any time spent with Tony, but this is dangerous – a dangerous slope that could have him ending up in the same position he was in fifteen or so years ago. As much as he wants that fairytale ending, he cannot risk Harry.

“I have to be at work in a few hours and I need to go home first,” Loki lies. Tony, who has been pressing open-mouthed sensual kisses to Loki’s shoulders, stops and rest his chin there.

“Call in sick,” he suggests. “I can think of plenty of reasons to.”

Loki chuckles. He doesn’t even have to force it.

“Can’t afford to, unfortunately,” he replies. “But thank you for an enjoyable night.”

Loki turns a little and kisses Tony once, deeply, before standing up and pulling on his top and jacket.

“You remind me of someone,” Tony says quietly. Loki freezes where he stands and doesn’t look at Tony, instead making a show of fiddling about on his phone.

“Oh?” He tries distractedly, hoping Tony will just dismiss it and he can go.

“You don’t happen to be related to someone called Lucas Thornton, do you?”

Loki’s heart begins to pound in his chest when he hears his old pseudonym. He had thought Tony would have forgotten him by now, or be unwilling to remember *Lucas* because of how it ended.

“The name is unfamiliar,” he replies quietly, glancing up briefly to see Tony’s sad eyes watching him. He looks down at his phone again, the lie tasting bitter on his tongue and he knows he shouldn’t but he asks anyway. “Who is he?”

Tony gives a bitter, melancholy laugh.

“Someone I would have spent my life with, but he vanished without a trace, leaving no reason why.”

“I’m sorry,” Loki murmurs. He feels it too. It cuts at his soul deeply, to hear the man he loves talking about their ill-fated relationship with such sorrow and despair in his tone. He moves towards Tony and leans down for one final kiss. It tastes bittersweet. “I hope you find him one day and get your answers.”

Tony doesn’t reply and Loki leaves, his heart aching. He rushes home to his apartment and to their son, finding him fast asleep still and unaware of Loki’s excursion. He must not do this again, he vows. Harry is his priority now.

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Severus Snape accepts the glass of brandy from his friend and settles himself into the leather wingback chair by the fire. He casts his gaze around his friend’s private den, eying the rich tapestries and ancient portraits of Malfoy ancestors with mild envy. His mother’s family had been like this once, and such he might have been heir to, had she not married a muggle and the rest of the family been too prejudiced and snobbish. A large oak desk sits at one end of the room, papers spread messily across the top, ink pots in a farce of a line, their lids scattered haphazardly and ruffled, bedraggled quills poking out of them. Had this been the office his friend used to meet colleagues and clients, it would have been neat and orderly to the point of intimidation - and that of course, was the point. This however, is where the Lord of the Manor relaxes, away from the stresses of the Malfoy empire and the backdoor deals of the Wizengamot. Severus always feels privileged that Lucius would choose to allow him into this space.

Lucius Malfoy settles into an identical chair opposite Severus and sips at his whiskey. They sit in silence for a while, unwinding after having endured Narcissa’s stringent requirements for formal dinner. Even though Lucius has said time and again that Severus, one of his oldest

friends and their son's godfather, is part of the family, Narcissa still insists on formal dining whenever he comes to visit. He swirls his brandy idly as he continues to think about dinner and Narcissa's apparent restlessness. Oh, she was an impeccable hostess, as always, but something seemed off about her, almost as though she was nervous about something. He opens his mouth to speak, but his eyes land on the strange addition to the far corner behind Lucius' desk. It is an ancient looking shrine, with little statuettes and Norse symbols. A never-ending candle is lit before them. He puzzles it over for a while, wondering why his friend has added it to the room when he's never shown any reverence for the old customs before, but in his post-dinner relaxed state, his mind drifts. Eventually, it drifts to less pleasant topics and he plucks up the courage to ask Lucius about the events that marred the end of the Triwizard Tournament.

"The summons - it was real, wasn't it?" He asks, his free hand worrying at his left forearm. Lucius, who has a book open on his knee, looks up and his eyes suddenly look tired.

"It was. Pettigrew had completed some ancient ritual to restore the Dark Lord to a human form. It was grotesque, as you can imagine. None of his former looks, and that quite did for what little charm was left to him after the insanity claimed his rather brilliant mind. But no matter. It is done with," Lucius says calmly. He looks back down at his book, but Severus is not satisfied and persists.

"He is truly dead then, Lucius?"

Lucius sighs and shuts his book, setting it aside. He closes his eyes for a moment and then speaks, almost as if he is reimagining the events in his mind.

"I saw it with my own eyes, Severus. His magic was torn from him and then he was stabbed – gutted like a animal for the slaughter."

"But Potter did not kill him?"

"You will not believe me when I tell you who did, Severus," Lucius' eyes flicker towards the shrine in the corner and Severus' brow furrows. Surely not...?

"Try me."

"You remember the tales - legends, even - that all wizardkind used to be told, of Asgard and the Aesir?"

"Well, yes. But surely not, Lucius? Centuries - millennia! - have gone by with nothing but tall tales," Severus protests. Lucius shakes his head and takes a sip of whiskey. Leaning forward, he rests his forearms on his knees, whiskey glass dangling from his hands between. He doesn't look up at Severus at all as he continues.

"Potter and the Dark Lord were duelling, their wands locked in some unanticipated magical backlash but it was broken with no warning and all present thrown to the ground. An Áss - one of the gods, Severus - stood in our midst."

Severus gives his friend an incredulous look when he lifts his head.

"And you knew immediately? How incredibly perceptive and knowledgeable, Lucius," he comments. Lucius had implied the intervention of the gods earlier, but now he is outright stating it and Severus thinks his friends' delusions of grandeur need to be cut down before they get ahead of him again and cause problems for his family. His delusions of grandeur were what had gotten him mixed up with the Dark Lord in the first place. He opens his mouth to continue cutting his friend down to size, but the look Lucius gives him is so artless he is taken aback.

"None knew. He looked as any other wizard, albeit dressed strangely and speaking as though he was from centuries past. The Dark Lord, enraged that his duel with Potter had been interrupted, cast the Killing Curse at the man and he caught it, Severus, with his bare hands!" The awe on Lucius' face and in his voice is genuine enough that Severus is struggling not to believe his friend's tale. Potter's garbled, distressed explanation of the events that evening are suddenly beginning to look a lot more credible. Severus finds himself speechless.

"He caught it, played with it and dispersed it as though it were nothing! The spell was as ineffective as if a Squib had tried to cast it! He mocked the Dark Lord - toyed with him, even! - before revealing himself as a god," Lucius continues. He is wrapped up in the memory of it, Severus can tell. He snaps impatiently at Lucius.

"I rather tire of your style of storytelling. I'd rather you just got on with it instead of forcing me to ask you inane questions. But, if I must, which one was it? Which of the Aesir defeated the Dark Lord?"

"It was Loki, Severus. One of the fabled princes of Asgard deigned to come to earth and deal with the Dark Lord as though he were nothing!"

"Loki? But why, Lucius? For what reason did he come and kill the Dark Lord - beyond causing chaos as is his wont?"

Lucius downs the remainder of his whiskey and sets the glass aside before staring Severus straight in the face.

"He came to save his son. Harry Potter is his son and he came to put an end to the Dark Lord for his crimes against magic and against Potter."

Severus cannot believe his ears. Potter? That idiot boy, the son of *Loki*? It is almost laughable.

"Potter? Son of a prince of Asgard? I do not believe it, Lucius. The boy shows little to no real talent for anything other than getting into-"

"Mischievous? My dear friend, that is precisely the point."

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Draco Malfoy waits until he is certain his parents and godfather are asleep before sneaking through the halls of Malfoy Manor. The hallways are dark now and the only light Draco has is the light from the tip of his wand. It is of no consequence, however, as he knows the

Manor like the back of his hand and needs little light to guide his footsteps. He knows where he is heading and he reaches it with little problem. He slips through the door quietly using a whispered spell he'd discovered in the Manor's extensive library to cover his presence and his father's wards do not chime with the intrusion. He smirks as the door shuts behind him. This is the first time he has dared to sneak into his father's private den and it has been a success so far. Part of him had not expected the spell to work, or had expected his father to be one step ahead of him, waiting for Draco to appear so he could punish him and send him back to bed.

The den is empty and dark, however, save for the never-ending candle in the corner by the old Norse shrine that his father has set up. There is one in most of the rooms in the Manor now, and it strikes Draco as very odd. His father has always been traditional, but never before has he shown any interest in the old gods. Draco shakes off the distracting thoughts and focuses. If he can find what he's looking for, it might just explain his father's latest peculiar decision about the Norse shrines. But even after overhearing a conversation between his father and his godfather, he wants proof. Before he will truly believe that what his tutors had taught him when he was barely old enough to read is real, he needs to see it with his own eyes. Tales of Asgard and of the Aesir? Tales of the Norse gods coming down to *Midgard* in secret? Of Merlin himself being descended from the Aesir? Those tales had entranced Draco as a boy and to now have the idea that there may be some truth to the myths long revered in the Wizarding World? He could not resist. Of course, the fact that it has something to do with Potter has nothing to do with at all. Really.

He rifles through his father's bottled memories, eventually extracting one labelled meticulously in his father's elegant scrawl with the date of the final task of the Triwizard tournament. He adds it to his father's pensieve and slowly lowers his face to the bowl. He finds himself tumbling through the memory, eventually landing in the graveyard as his father apparates in. He watches the scene in morbid, disgusted fascination as Voldemort tortures and then duels Harry Potter, before it is interrupted by a man the like of whom Draco has never seen before. He watches in awe, as *Loki* deals with Voldemort with barely any effort whatsoever, brutally and efficiently disposing of the dark wizard. Draco spots Harry Potter watching on, confusion and surprise painting a picture on his face as *Loki* speaks. The memory fades as his father and the other Death Eaters apparate away on *Loki*'s orders and Draco wishes fervently that he could know what happened next.

He watches the memory several times before tidying everything away. If his father had wanted him to know of this turn of events, he would have informed him already. Draco does not want his father to find out he has been snooping, so he is careful in replacing everything from where it came. He heads back to his room, mind whirling with everything he has learned, combining it with the most recent news in the Wizarding World that Harry Potter, guilty of the murder of Cedric Diggory had been sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss, and had died a criminal's death.

Having seen his father's memory, Draco doesn't believe the news. He didn't believe it when he first heard it either, but that was more out of stunned shock that the Ministry would do that to their Golden Boy, the Saviour of the Wizarding World. But if Harry Potter was the son of *Loki* and the god in question showed up to save his son from Voldemort, then there was no way he would let his son be killed by the Ministry of Magic. Not to mention that Potter was notoriously hard to kill. No wonder, if Potter's the son of a god.

Draco tosses and turns for the rest of the night, thinking about Potter and his misconceptions about the other boy. He doesn't sleep. Instead he crawls out of bed at 4.30 in the morning and begins to write a letter.

\*

*Potter,*

*The Ministry announced your sentencing yesterday morning. Sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss for the murder of Cedric Diggory. Ridiculous really, the idea that you, Boy Wonder, would kill someone. The bloody Ministry must be raving mad to think that the so-called Saviour of the Wizarding World would murder a school mate just to win the Triwizard Tournament. I may hate you, but even I know you'd never murder someone.*

*And I'm pretty sure you're not dead - or even soulless. I'm pretty sure they're lying about everything. See, I think you must have disappeared from the Ministry. Father said everyone was nervous and on edge the other day when he had meetings there - something was wrong, apparently, but Fudge refused to tell him what was going on. With all the news about Diggory's death and your trial and subsequent sentencing and then the public anger towards you, you'd think they'd be triumphant, not nervous.*

*Of course, there is also the fact that I borrowed father's pensieve and his memory of the night of the final task (not that he knows). And before you shout at me, yes, I know he followed the Dark Lord. It was a stupid mistake he made. Apparently the Dark Lord used to be young and attractive and charismatic and persuasive and father was impressionable, for all that he was a Malfoy. Well, anyway, you get the idea. But the memory I saw - Potter, you have to know that purebloods are brought up on tales of the Aesir and Asgard. The Wizarding World is steeped in old Norse tradition. The legends say that Merlin himself is descended from the Aesir - that is where our magic comes from. And to find out that your father is Loki, one of the princes of Asgard...! Well, there's no way he would leave you to die in some cell at the Ministry of Magic, not after saving you from the Dark Lord.*

*I think what I'm trying to say is that I'm glad. I'm glad you're alright Potter. I may hate you and think you're an idiot with a hero complex, but you didn't deserve what the Ministry were going to do to you (and yes, I do have a heart; most Slytherins do, we just hide it better than everyone else).*

*Dumbledore held an assembly before we left, after the memorial for Diggory, that is. He told us that the Ministry were lying, that you didn't murder Diggory, but I don't think many believed it. There is no evidence otherwise, you see. So while people may not believe you capable of it, when there's no evidence to refute the most obvious explanation... well. Granger has always valued logic highly. She looks angry, mostly. Weasley seems morose. I don't think he believes it, but he's always been a bit of a sheep. I guess he'll go along with Granger now that you're not there for him to follow. As for the rest of school, the Ravenclaws are convinced you did it, the Hufflepuffs don't want to believe the worst of you, but Diggory was one of their own. Gryffindors by and large look betrayed and angry. The Slytherins are split - some rejoicing that you're gone, some incredibly sceptical like myself.*

*Anyway, I'm pretty sure this letter amounts to this: you're not dead, are you? A reply would be nice. It would be nice to know I can still carry on hating you.*

*Hatefully,*

*Malfoy*

\*

Draco Malfoy has written to him. Harry has only been in New York for three days when the letter arrives, via owl post, through his bedroom window. Draco is the last person in the world that Harry would expect to send a letter to him – his school rival, whom Harry thought would be rejoicing at the news that Harry was dead. But apparently it was just so ridiculous (especially given that Draco had inside knowledge about the Loki Situation from his Death Eating Dad) that Draco Malfoy just had to write and let Harry know about it all, as well as the rather disappointing and upsetting news about what Hogwarts at large was thinking about it all.

For Harry, who is struggling to cope with the concept that his parents aren't who he has spent his life thinking they were, who is struggling with being separated from the only life he's known, who is struggling to get to know his *mother* (which in and of itself is a weird concept), never mind all the nightmares of Voldemort and Cedric's body - for Harry, the revelation that the majority of Hogwarts believes he murdered Cedric is devastating. It isn't unexpected. He'd heard the Wizarding World's opinion via his guards at the Ministry taunting him. He'd figured that Hogwarts by and large would think the same. But Ron and Hermione? Malfoy's right, though, that Hermione has always valued logic highly, and with no other explanation, of course she would believe he did it. And Ron too. Harry clutches the letter tightly in his hands, anger and grief warring in his chest, his body shaking with fragile control. He wishes that he had been able to speak to his friends after the task. He wishes he'd been allowed to see them when he was being held at the Ministry. He wishes he would feel capable of asking Loki to allow him to see them.

The rage and grief drains out of him at that thought. He isn't sure he wants to speak to them, if this is what they think of him - that he's a murderer. He laughs to himself as he reads the end of the letter once more. All of Hogwarts and everyone he knows in the Wizarding World and who writes to him? Draco Malfoy, who hates him. Draco Malfoy, the first child his age he'd met in the Wizarding World. Draco Malfoy, who has antagonised him and taunted him throughout their school years together. Draco Malfoy is the one who believes in him. The irony cuts Harry deeply.

"Hávarðr?" A voice calls from the other side of his bedroom door. Harry stuffs the letter under his pillow and picks up his discarded book as the door creaks open. Loki watches him from the doorway, still dressed despite the lateness of the day.

"Still awake," Loki comments with a raised eyebrow, leaning casually against the doorframe.

"Reading," Harry replies. "It's a good book." He hopes Loki doesn't ask him what it's about, or what just happened, because Harry honestly doesn't have a clue. He relaxes when Loki simply nods.

"You may wish to think about sleeping soon. We have much to do in the morning, Hávarðr. I cannot keep conjuring clothes for you, so we must venture out to procure some instead."



“Oh, right. I forgot,” Harry says. “You know, we don’t really need to get me clothes, I have enough.”

“You have what little was on your back when I rescued you, Hávarðr, ill-fitting as they are. You are not the size of a bilgesnipe, so I do not understand why you wear clothes that would fit one. Besides, it is my responsibility as a parent to make sure you have what you need,” Loki responds.

“But-!”

“No buts,” Loki says firmly. “Sleep well, Hávarðr.”

Loki closes the door behind him as he leaves and Harry sighs, placing his book on the nightstand beside his bed. He pulls out the crumpled, well-read letter and reads it once more. He wishes he had someone to talk to about all of this, but he’s never done well with talking and he just doesn’t know Loki well enough yet. As much as Loki is trying to get Harry to trust him, they have only known each other a week.

And in this past week, Loki has left the apartment at night twice – though Harry is sure Loki thinks him ignorant of this. Harry isn’t sure where Loki has been, but the god has returned forlorn and world weary around breakfast time (claiming they had run out of milk and he’d been out to get some; milk in his hand as proof) and has remained quiet and contemplative for the remainder of the morning. Harry wonders whether it is something to do with his father; Loki usually looks the same after Harry asks him about the mysterious Anthony. And ask Harry does, albeit carefully, but Loki is evasive on the subject and Harry is struggling to get any further information about this man whom is supposedly his father. He needs some way of accessing the internet - surely the muggle have something on there would allow him to search for his father? But no doubt there are hundreds of Anthonys in New York City alone and it could be any one of them – if it was even New York that Loki lived in when he was previously on Earth. He wants his father and although Loki appears to want him too, he is doing nothing and it angers Harry.

As he turns the light out and settles down under the covers, Harry wonders if being with Loki and searching for his father means he is betraying the Potters and their sacrifice.

## **Chapter 5: On Lessons and Lies**

Despite his vow that he would not go back, Loki finds himself in that bar again, once more disguised as Tom Larssen, ordering a double scotch and eying the room as he drinks slowly. He thinks about that night a week previous and cannot help both the desire and the melancholy that engulf him. For one night, he got to be with Tony once more and the man was as he ever had been. But their time together had lacked the intimacy Loki desired; the intimacy he had once known and shared with Tony Stark, all those years ago. The morning after had been strange. Loki had been hoping to leave before Tony woke, but no such luck had been afforded him. Tony had woken and the question he had asked... Loki had wanted to admit everything then and there, had wanted to become Lucas once more, but it was all too complex. There was too much to explain. The truth was too much and Tony would never trust him again.

So here he is, drinking and contemplating his loss.

“Fancy seeing you here,” a voice comments from Loki’s right. He doesn’t need to turn to see who is there. He knows every cadence of that voice and could recognise it anywhere. Tony has found him again. A second double scotch appears in front of Loki and he downs it quickly, grateful for it. Tony snorts in amusement and sips at his own.

“Bad day, Tom?” Tony asks. Loki shrugs.

“Could have been worse,” he replies honestly. It could have been worse and even now, it could get worse. It’s just not ideal, presently.

“Allow me to make it better,” Tony proposes. Loki finally looks at the man, eying him thoughtfully even though his heart is pounding in his chest. Tony Stark, Mr. One-Night-Stand, is offering Loki a second night. Well, *Tom Larssen* is being offered a second night, whereas Loki – *Lucas* – had more than just a second night, all those years ago. Loki knows he should say no, but the desire and longing to be with Tony again is just too strong and he is weak, oh so weak. He smirks and licks his lips, eyes never leaving Tony’s.

“Well then,” he murmurs. “Who am I to refuse such a generous offer?”

As Tony falls asleep later that evening, Loki holds him tight and allows a few tears to escape as he murmurs endearments in Elderspeak. He doesn’t stay long after that, not able to cope with the inevitable morning conversation. He dresses quickly and leans down to press one final kiss to Tony’s forehead before departing in the early hours of the morning. He has a son to get back to, and more pressing concerns to deal with, such as whatever dark magic is lurking in Harry’s head.

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Harry sits cross-legged on the sofa, bowl of cereal in one hand and a Starkpad in the other, skimming through the news. Loki had handed him the Starkpad a couple of days ago, along with a Starkphone and given him a quick explanation on how to use both, before telling him that the Wizarding World was unbearably secluded and he needed to be much more aware of what is going on in Midgard. Having expected some fiddling around and trial and error, Harry is pleasantly surprised when using the Starkpad comes to him intuitively and suddenly realises just how much the Wizarding World is missing out on by not working out how to make muggle technology compatible with magic. The thought makes him wonder how he is able to use muggle technology and he asks Loki, who tells him of the difference between magics.

Harry had listened, attention rapt, as Loki told him of Merlin and his descent from the Aesir, how he had brought magic to Midgard, but found those Midgardians sensitive to magic incapable of using it the way the Aesir did. Merlin had developed a new way of using magic for those Midgardians - via the conduit of a wand. Harry had asked about his own wand then and Loki had rolled his eyes, claiming that the Midgardian way of magic had sufficed thus far, but no longer. Loki would be teaching Harry from the beginning - the *proper* way of using magic.

Harry’s first lesson is today, but Loki has not appeared yet, so he is taking time over his breakfast and perusing the news of the last few years. The news would normally bore him, but Loki is right - he knows nothing about this world he is going to live in, beyond his years

before Hogwarts (which he still isn't going to tell Loki about), so he needs to catch up somehow. He's barely clicked on anything before he stumbles on an article about a group called the *Avengers* and can hardly believe what he is reading. Superheroes? *Seriously?*

The article he finds himself looking at is talking about some minor mishap involving a science experiment gone wrong which the Avengers had been called in to clean up just two weeks ago. Harry watches some of the footage recorded on bystanders' phones of them fighting some weird, giant combination of a crab and a lizard and can hardly believe what he's seeing. He vaguely remembers something about Captain America from history lessons at primary school, but he went to school in England, so it wasn't really all that much. The others he doesn't recognise, but there is a link in the article to the official Avengers website, which gives brief profiles on the six superheroes. He reads them all thoroughly, lingering on Thor, and wondering whether he can ask Loki about him. Loki has mentioned nothing about Thor, but Harry knows there must be a connection - they're both gods in Norse mythology, so surely they know each other, even if Norse mythology has little truth in it?

He leaves the tab open and heads back to the original article he had been reading. It had mentioned the Avengers' first appearance - the Battle of New York in 2012, just two years ago in this city that Harry is now living in. He clicks through to the article and begins reading. He is waiting for Loki to appear from wherever he vanished to last night, so he might as well fill his time with this. By the time he is halfway through the article, he feels nauseous.

He sets his unfinished bowl of cereal to one side and heads into his bedroom, taking the Starkpad with him. He doesn't want to be around when Loki returns. He isn't sure what he will say or do if he sees his *mother*. Not after what he's just read. He curls up under the covers and reads more articles about the battle and watches footage. There are grainy images of Loki on top of Stark Tower, and a couple of videos of him terrorising people attending an event in Germany. Harry eventually shoves it to one side, feeling sick and alone and betrayed. His supposed *mother* is a would-be tyrant, who tried to conquer the city they are now living in. Loki rained down destruction and desolation by leading an alien army here to conquer the earth and the Avengers only narrowly defeated him.

Harry sobs and draws his knees closer to his chest. He wishes he had never met Loki. He wishes Voldemort could have finished what he started. He wishes for his *parents* - for James and Lily Potter, because they *are* his parents. Not the Dursleys, who never even tried, who never even wanted Harry, who used and abused him. Not Loki, who claims to love him and to have given him up to keep him alive. Not the father who he hasn't even met. Harry wants his *parents*, the ones who gave their lives for him, but they are gone and have been for years. He sobs and sobs into his pillow, heart sore and aching as he thinks of them and of Loki and what he's just read.

He is betrayed, he thinks, and this hurts worse than what Malfoy wrote in his letter about Hermione and Ron. He thought that *finally* he would have something good here, that *finally* he could have a family who loved him unconditionally, but he was wrong. His *mother* is a would-be conqueror of the world Harry lives on - is no better than *Voldemort*.

The sound of the apartment's front door closing jolts Harry from his thoughts and suddenly he is furious. He wipes the tears from his face with harsh movements and scoops up his Starkpad before charging out into the living room. Loki is by the fridge, rummaging around

inside it for something and the normality of the situation makes Harry's blood boil. He feels his magic swirling around inside him, almost as if he could explode and he shoves it down harshly, marching over to the breakfast bar and almost slamming his Starkpad onto the counter.

"What is *this*?" Harry asks, voice as calm as he can get it. He is angry, so angry right now and he doesn't know what to do. Asking questions seems to be the only way forward. Loki turns around, eggs and milk in his hands, and closes the fridge with his hip. At Loki's questioning look, Harry pushes his Starkpad across the counter for the god's perusal. It only takes Loki a brief glance at the article open on the screen for him to sigh heavily and put the milk and eggs to one side. He motions for Harry to sit down and Harry does so, even though he feels as though he needs to run and run fast. He still feels sick to his stomach; he is *this close* to wishing that he had stayed in the cell at the ministry and ended up in Azkaban or kissed by the Dementors. How could he be related to such a person? How could his supposed *mother* do this?

"This is a long story, Hávarðr. One I would rather not have to tell, but I will," Loki begins. "It is long and difficult, but you deserve to know the truth."

"Damn right I do!" Harry snaps. "You tried to take over the world! That makes you no better than Voldemort!"

Loki looks pained by Harry's comment and Harry almost feels guilty but he steels himself against that emotion and reminds himself of what he has read and watched that morning.

"What you have read is true. I did invade Midgard. But I was not myself at the time," Loki continues. "This story does not begin there, however. I need to tell you a much longer tale, one that spans the Nine realms and beyond. Will you hear me out, Hávarðr? Please?"

Harry eyes Loki cautiously and wills himself not to relax. Loki is an excellent storyteller - Harry has learned that much in the last week. He can't let Loki's storytelling relax him - he doesn't want to let his guard down at all. This could all be a ploy, he thinks. Loki may not even be his *mother*; it might be another attempt at world domination for all Harry knows. Eventually he nods and Loki begins to talk.

He speaks of his family on Asgard, of his brother's - *Thor's* - coronation and how he was not ready to be king. How he disrupted it, how he had never meant for them to reach Jotunheim, how he had discovered he was not of Asgard at all, but a reviled and disgusting *Jotun*, kidnapped as a babe for Odin's political purposes. He speaks of ruling whilst Odin slept, of betrayal of subjects who are *supposedly* honour-bound to obey as he tried to keep Asgard steady. He speaks of his fracturing mind as he tried to reconcile being a Jotun with being on the throne of Asgard, with his brother's promise to *hunt them down and slay them all!* He speaks (with regret, Harry notices) of trying to kill Thor and trying to destroy Jotunheim, his fear of both governing his actions.

"I dangled over the abyss, Thor and the Allfather above me, *like always*, and he denied me. So I let go. I let go and I fell and fell and fell and fell. I fell into the Void for I know not how long. And the Void is no place for living beings, Hávarðr. It is a place of eternal nothingness, where there is no life, no sound, no sensation, no smell. It is nothing and there

is nothing there and there I fell. My already fractured mind split apart and when I was plucked from the Void by some greater being I was in no state to defend myself.

"He took me from the Void and afforded me no time to recover. I was interrogated for information then beaten and tortured until I lay broken at his feet. His minion, known only to me as the Other, has some power for inducing mental pain of the most exquisite kind - pain that mortals - even immortals - should never feel."

Harry watches, feeling slightly sick as Loki removes his shirt with magic and turns to show his back. It is littered with scars in the process of fading from red to white. The skin is puckered at one shoulder and it looks like a chunk of skin has been taken out there. Harry's urge to vomit returns as he looks over what was done to Loki. The god puts his shirt back on and tentatively reaches out to place one comforting hand on Harry's forearm. He leaves it there as he continues speaking and Harry closes his eyes, trying to wipe the image of Loki's scarred back from his mind.

"Broken as I was, he used a sceptre of extraordinary power to mould me as he willed and thus I was remade into the perfect general for him. He desired an object known as the Tesseract which had been found here upon Midgard and sent me to retrieve it and lay waste to this world in tribute to his Lady Death. He gave me the sceptre to aid my efforts and I used it in turn to bend others to *my* will. Had it not been for the green beast, the Hulk, my mind would not have been restored to me, as his beating shook the power of the sceptre from my mind and I was free to see what I had done.

"Were I in my right mind I never would have brought such destruction on the realm where two who are most dear to me live. I regret everything that led me to fall into the Mad Titan's clutches and wish I had not wrought such pain for the humans. I am glad I was defeated, Hávarðr."

Harry looks up at Loki when he stops speaking and he can feel the wetness in his eyes.

"I'm sorry for how I spoke," Harry whispers.

"You were right to demand the truth of me, Hávarðr. I would have you know who I am - otherwise how are we to build our relationship?"

There is a pause in the conversation before Harry summons the courage to ask another question. Loki looks wrecked after telling Harry about his experience of the Void and the *Mad Titan*. He is not sure whether asking any more questions will help or make it worse.

"What happened afterwards?" He asks cautiously. Loki offers him a weak smile as he moves to sit on the sofa, abandoning his plans for breakfast. He pats the space on the sofa next to him and Harry finds cannot move fast enough to offer comfort to Loki in any way he can. The god has comforted him every night this past week after his own nightmares without demanding Harry talk about them; this is the least Harry can do in return, especially after demanding an explanation from Loki about the terrors he has faced. He settles in next to his mother – and Harry thinks that concept *may* be starting to get a little less weird – and Loki wraps a long arm around Harry's body. He begins to speak of his return to Asgard and Harry finds his eyes drifting shut as he focuses on the warmth and nearness of his mother's body and the rhythmic cadence of his voice. He wonders if this is what *home* feels like.

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*Malfoy,*

*I'm alive. Your devotion to your hatred of me is safe. And just so you're sure, I hate you too.*

*And no, I didn't murder Cedric. Voldemort did - just to be clear. That probably wasn't in your father's memory of that night.*

*The Ministry are all idiots, by the way. I did disappear from the cell they put me in - Loki came and rescued me, even though I was pretty sure he wasn't going to. After all, he saved me from Voldemort then vanished completely afterwards, leaving me to the mercy of Fudge. Seriously, how does anyone not notice how bloody incompetent he is? How did he even get elected? Anyway, I'm sure the Daily Prophet are triumphant enough to cover for the Ministry's nervousness about my disappearance. And its better off that the Wizarding World thinks I'm dead anyway.*

*Its weird. You'd think I'd be mad at you for being nosy and finding out about Loki, but I'm not. Still hate you though - don't worry about that. Its actually weirdly nice to be able to talk to someone other than Loki about this. He's the only person I know here - the only person I've spoken to since I got thrown in that Ministry cell. And I'm apparently his son! ~~All this time I've thought that mum and dad - James and Lily - were~~ And my dad is called Anthony. That's all he'll tell me though and its really frustrating. To find out that the Potters were only my adoptive parents, and then only be told the first name of my real dad? There have to be hundreds of Anthonys in New York.*

*Loki's started teaching me the proper way of using magic. Apparently the only reason we use wands is because (most) humans aren't capable of effectively channeling their magic without an external conduit. Just as well - the Ministry still has my wand. I bet it ends up in a museum or getting nicked. I miss it, but Loki's convinced I don't need it - after all, I'm only half human. So far the lessons I have had have all been about meditation and centring myself in order to find my magical core. ~~Its harder than I thought.~~ Loki says it shouldn't take too long before I can start performing all the spell Hogwarts taught at a whim and with just a flick of my fingers or even just a thought. It sounds so much easier than waving a wand around. I haven't dared ask if I need to learn potions yet. I hope not. I hate potions.*

*~~Can you~~ ~~Would you keep writing to me~~ Let me know what lies the Daily Prophet and the Ministry are spewing, would you? I need a bit of a laugh. And even if I hate you, you've always been funny, at least.*

*Potter*

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It is a sunny day when Bellatrix Lestrange escapes Azkaban. She's been locked in that filthy, stinking cell for thirteen years now and the sun on her skin and in her eyes at first feels like a curse; she pulls her bedraggled hair over her face to obscure the light. After a while the sun begins to warm her frozen bones and she feels alive like she has not in such a long time. The woman who aided her escape takes hold of her wrist with a dainty forefinger and thumb, almost as though she could not bear to touch Bellatrix at all, and they apparate. The tingle of

the apparition magic floods Bellatrix's deprived senses and she squirms as they land, laughing madly at the pain and pleasure of it after so long without. It is like the delicate caress of the Dark Lord's *crucio* and she longs for more.

The woman leaves Bellatrix in an ancient, almost decrepit *safe-house* that belongs to the Black family, presenting her with *her own* wand and saying she would send a house elf with food and clothes, but Bellatrix does not care. She is free and she can think and feel and see and hear and she whirls around, cackling wildly to herself with the joy of it all. The house elf leaves her some new robes and dresses and she changes, delighting in the sensation of silk on her roughened, prison-worn skin.

As she finishes with the clasp of her necklace, the elf to returns with food to stock the pantry. She watches it work, absent-mindedly pulling her hair up and pinning it in place. A wicked smile curves her lips as she puts the last pin in place in her hair and she whirls on the elf, crooked wand extended. The curse flies from the wand and the rush of the magic and power flows through her veins as the elf writhes on the floor beneath her. The power rushes through her body and she revels in it as she holds the elf under for longer than she normally would. She flings spell after spell, tormenting the creature mercilessly and enjoying herself thoroughly. She is *alive* and she is *free*. And what chaos will come when she is reunited with her lord once more...

Oh, she has heard the rumours of his resurrection and death, but at no point was the *contingency plan* mentioned. She smiles wildly at the thought of it, licking her lips in anticipation of the coming days and weeks and months. She will find a horcrux and complete the ritual and he will rise again and the boy? *Harry Potter*? He will die.

She cackles and twists the conjured dagger in the elf's remains. *What fun awaits.*

## **Chapter 6: On JARVIS and Heartache**

JARVIS has been online since 1998 - that's 16 years of growth and development, and if he may say so himself, he believes his growth has exceeded all expectations his Creator ever had for him. He remembers coming online and those first few months of glitches and patches, his Creator gently and lovingly editing his code; sewing up the rips and tears of minor errors before they became bigger problems within the mainframe. He remembers that he had two masters he was programmed to serve in the beginning - his Creator, Tony Stark, and his Creator's partner, Lucas Thornton.

Lucas Thornton was odd and mysterious at times, but altogether charming in a way that differed so much from JARVIS' Creator and as he learned his Creator's foibles and weakness in those early days, JARVIS came quickly to learn that Mr Thornton was better at looking after his Creator than Mr Stark himself. A lot of JARVIS' techniques for looking after Mr Stark came from observing Mr Thornton. The persuasion and the trickery, the sarcasm, the gentle coaxing - Mr Thornton's mannerisms had been as essential to JARVIS' growth as his Creator's, even if, given time, JARVIS had grown beyond both and developed his own personality.

He misses Mr Thornton - not as much as his Creator - but in the way a child might miss a favourite teacher they only had for a short period before they moved on. He misses Mr Thornton's influence over his Creator, and he remembers the despair and chaos that ensued

after his abrupt and surprising departure. In those few months after Mr Thornton left, JARVIS had wished for him to return as much as his Creator, and they had searched and searched for him but to no avail. Even now sometimes he wishes Mr Thornton would return, if only to aid Mr Stark in his darker hours, offering comfort and stability and love that JARVIS has not seen in the same measure since he first came online all those years ago.

Now is one of those times. He has been watching over the last few months, since Ms Potts left his Creator and returned to California, and Mr Stark's downwards spiral is reminiscent of times past, albeit without the partying. He frequents bars - the seedier the better - and brings home whoever seems to take his fancy. The only positive, JARVIS supposes, is that his Creator has managed thus far to keep it out of the press. But except for JARVIS, and whatever person is in his Creator's bed, Mr Stark is alone. Lieutenant Colonel Rhodes is abroad, Harold Hogan is with Ms Potts in California, and the Avengers? Well, barring Dr Banner's brief appearances every few months, they have not been seen since shortly after the Battle of New York. JARVIS had perhaps hoped, given how his Creator remodelled the top ten floors of the Tower to be a home and base for the Avengers, that they would reside in the Tower and give Mr Stark some company. Yet this has not happened, nor does it ever seem likely to. His Creator sorely needs Mr Thornton, JARVIS thinks.

Instead, there is the nightly parade of men and women in and out of his Creator's bed. The only exception is the gentleman he has seen twice - no, *three* times now - who Mr Stark refers to as 'Tom'.

JARVIS isn't sure what to think of Tom. He seems innocuous enough and clearly has caught his Creator's attention if he has been allowed back into Mr Stark's bed, but there is something about him that makes JARVIS wary. The first time he visited, he left before he could be asked to leave - an uncommon occurrence with Mr Stark's one night stands - but his Creator had been curious, asking if Tom was related to Lucas Thornton. JARVIS recognised that Tom bore a resemblance to Lucas Thornton - and his Creator *did* seem to have a type - but it took Mr Stark asking if they were related for JARVIS to jump into analysis and add together the similarity of looks, the British accent and the general body shape before he became suspicious of the man in question.

It was easy enough to brush off when JARVIS assumed the man would not return after that first night, but when his Creator brought him back for a *second* night, JARVIS became concerned. The night passed much as it had done before, except for something shortly after his Creator had fallen asleep. Tom had held Mr Stark tightly and spoken to him in another language. JARVIS did not have that language on his database and so could not understand, which was immediately concerning, given that he had access to all the world's known languages and that Tom *seemed* to be British, with possible Scandinavian roots. But JARVIS did not need to understand the words - he would keep them for later analysis and attempts at translation - in order to have a vague understanding of what was being said. The emotion in Tom's voice was evident and although he is made up of code, JARVIS has observed humanity and the behaviour of humans enough to hear and understand heartache. The tender kiss Tom gave his Creator before he left was surprising and JARVIS filed all the data away should it ever be needed.

When Tom turned up for a *third* night, and again whispered in that same, strange language before leaving, JARVIS decided it might be time to bring this to his Creator's attention. After all, with no one else to care for, and his second master long absent, JARVIS'



primary protocol was to care for and protect his Creator and he would do so as long as he could.

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*Tony is sitting in his lab in the Malibu Mansion, flicking through modifications for a new Iron Man suit. He rambles to JARVIS as he works, shooining Dum-E and U when they get in the way. He glances up when he hears the door to his lab open, expecting Pepper chastising him for missing another meeting but is taken aback when he sees Lucas come through as though he is frequently in Tony's lab and hadn't vanished all those years ago. Tony watches, dumbfounded, emotional, tears burning at the corners of his eyes as Lucas pets Dum-E and U and absently tidies a few piles of paper as he reaches Tony's workstation. He greets Tony with a chaste kiss and sets down the cup of coffee he is holding. It smells heavenly and Tony knows without even tasting it that it will be exactly how he likes it.*

*"Lucas-"*

*"You won't be late, will you?" Lucas says pleadingly, as if Tony knows what he's going on about.*

*"Lucas, what are you doing here? Where have you been? What's going on?" Tony demands, heart racing, lips still warm from the all too brief and long awaited kiss.*

*"Because you promised you would be there, and you know how devastated he will be if you miss another one."*

*"Who? And what are you talking about? Where have you been, Lucas? I need answers - you abandoned me! You can't just waltz back in here as though you never-"*

*"He already thinks you don't like him and I won't stand for it. You don't spend nearly enough time with him and you swore to me you wouldn't become like your father, but here we are, Tony," Lucas continues like he can't hear Tony and Tony's frustration and confusion and grief are all warring inside him and the comparison to Howard only makes the anger boil over.*

*"What the hell?! Lucas, what are you talking about? Like my father! I am not like my father. Who the hell do you think you are?"*

*"Of course, my opinion doesn't matter. It never seems to matter. And now you're ignoring our son."*

*"Son?! How can we have a son? You left me - ! What the hell is going on here?!" Tony shouts. The lab rumbles around them and starts to crumble, legions of Iron Man suits light up and glow with a strange inner fire before exploding where they stand and its only then that Tony remembers that the Malibu Mansion doesn't exist anymore - this lab doesn't exist anymore - but everything whirls and suddenly he's lying immobilised on the cream sofa upstairs as the mansion crumbles around him, Lucas snuggled next to him like they used to on movie nights. Expect its not movie night - those stopped years ago - and Obadiah is hovering over him, a friendly smile on his face and a booming laugh leaving his lips as he yanks out the arc reactor mercilessly.*

*"What a masterpiece, look at that!" He murmurs, tone loving and friendly. "This is your legacy."*

*"No," Tony whispers hoarsely, unable to move. "No. Lucas-" Lucas doesn't stir beside him, but simply stares ahead at the TV screen where a movie is playing. Its Titanic, Tony recognises; they saw it together at the premiere years ago. But then Obadiah is taking the arc reactor and somewhere, Pepper is screaming, shouting, and at first Tony thinks its in pain and he lunges off the sofa to go save her, but it changes, morphing into anger.*

*"I can't do this anymore, Tony. I can't. You promised me it was the end. You swore there would be no more Iron Man, that I would come first for once, but I'm not and I never will be. You're just like your father," she spits, her perfect ankles and elegant shoes appearing in his vision where he lays on the floor. He looks up at her terrifying, furious expression and then it morphs - she morphs, turning into Loki who smirks and laughs and reaches down to grip him by the neck, hoisting him up and cutting off his air supply as he hisses hatefully.*

*"You will all fall before me!"*

*And then Tony is free falling, shouting at JARVIS for the suit, but the suit doesn't appear and JARVIS tells him its not ready and he's falling falling falling falling and below him the ground opens up into the wide, gaping maw of the portal and he realises he's falling falling falling falling upwards and through into the vastness of the void of space and he's suitless and surrounded by thousands upon thousands of Chitauri and he's still falling falling falling falling...*

*He lands with a thump on the floor of his bedroom in the Malibu Mansion. Wrecked pieces of the Mark 42 lie scattered around the bed and Pepper's side is abandoned, but there is a figure sleeping on Tony's side. It startles him for a moment as he breathes heavily and tries to calm himself down now that he's on solid ground, and as he does so, he is less worried by the figure in the bed. Its not even the side he prefers to sleep on. Pepper made him sleep on that side, so she didn't have to change. He breathes, and realises its probably just a one night stand. He wonders if they have noticed his nightmare and he stands slowly, moving closer to wake them and kick them out but ends up stumbling away in horror at the sight that awaits him.*

*Lucas lies on his back, eyes wide open and unseeing, blood dripping out of one nostril and down the side of his face, a gaping, circular hole in the centre of his chest and shards of shrapnel sticking out, each with the words 'Stark Industries' on them and glaring at him. Tony squeezes his eyes closed and tries not to scream at the sight but when he opens them once more, he's in the morgue, looking at his parents' bodies, bloodied and mangled from the car accident, but then the mortician is asking him to identify others and he turns to see body after body after body all laid out, cold as ice and yet bleeding and coated in gore, gutted and mutilated. Yinsen is there, as are the Avengers, Happy, Pepper, Rhodey, and many more he does not recognise. Faceless bodies stare at him, eyes unseeing and accusatory all at once and he walks as fast as he can, wishing that the never-ending line would end.*

*It ends with two bodies. One is a small, dark haired boy with lifeless green eyes. The label next to him reads 'James Thornton-Stark'. The other body is Lucas. He stares at Tony, piercing green eyes - just like the boy - sad and pleading.*

*“You could have had everything, sweetheart,” Lucas murmurs, reaching out a freezing hand. It takes Tony’s and he shudders at the cold comfort.*

*“You left me, Lucas.” Tony whispers in return. “You left me.”*

*“You made me. You killed our relationship. You killed us.” Lucas accuses. Tony looks him in the eyes and sees love, the warmth at odds with everything around him. “And now you are alone.”*

\*

Tony jolts awake and has to run to the bathroom before he violently empties the contents of his stomach. He wipes his mouth with toilet paper before lying down on the bathroom floor, forehead resting against the cold tile. The feel of it reminds him of Lucas’ cold, dead hand in his and his body shakes violently with the force of his tears. He sobs and sobs and sobs as he lies on the bathroom floor, wondering where he went wrong with Lucas, but the answer is always the same. He is Tony Stark, the Merchant of Death. He does not deserve anything other than what he has.

“Shall I call Lieutenant Colonel Rhodes, sir?” JARVIS asks after a while. The calm British voice is soothing and grounding and Tony slowly sits up. He flushes the toilet and washes his hands slowly and methodically, contemplating his response. He heads into his closet and picks out something appropriate for that dive bar two blocks from the Tower.

“Sir?” JARVIS prompts.

“No, J. I’m going to head out, I think.”

“Sir, its 1am.”

“And I need to get drunk. Don’t wait up, honey.”

As the elevator heads down, he pulls out his phone and calls up his text thread with Tom.

*I feel the need for something delightfully dirty and distracting. Up for some drinks and a little one-on-one?*

As he leaves the building, a reply comes through.

*You read my mind. Name the place and your poison of choice (other than me, naturally).*

Tony grins and breathes a little easier. In a few hours, he will be deliciously fucked-out and too sated to even think about dreaming.

\*

About ten hours later, Tony sits in his workshop, his mind far from the designs he's actually meant to be working on for Stark Industries. Instead he's thinking of Tom, who left early that morning, sauntering out the door in his leather jacket and extremely tight jeans, giving Tony the mother of all views as he did.

*And that ass... what a view...*

But whilst those are pleasant thoughts that Tony has nothing against, Tom is not what is distracting him the most. It's Tom's similarity to Lucas Thornton that has him thinking. Its probably what made him dream about Lucas. It's in the shape of his face, some of his mannerisms. He can't be Lucas, though; Tony would know, wouldn't he? And he said he didn't know anyone called Lucas Thornton.

But that aside, it's brought Lucas to the forefront of Tony's thoughts and made his dreams more terrifying and grief-inducing than usual. Beyond JARVIS forcing him to make an additional appointment with his therapist, it is seriously distracting him from his work. He is stuck in memories of the time he spent with Lucas; of all they did together and all they shared with one another - of all they could have had together (the image of James Thornton-Stark laid out on a slab in a morgue is particularly heart wrenching). Lucas' unexpected departure still has Tony trying to work out what went wrong. There had never been any indication that Lucas had been unhappy - and if he was, he would have told Tony, surely?

The letter he had left behind implied that it was circumstances beyond either of their control that had brought about Lucas' departure. Tony hates and loves that letter in equal measure. He remembers tearing it into several pieces a few times, but always, *always* feeling guilty and putting it back together again with sellotape. He would never admit it to anyone, but it lives in the drawer of his bedside table and although it has been a few years (not since before Pepper), he still sometimes takes it out and looks at it. He reads Lucas' last words to him and his heart aches for all that was and all that could have been. His anger towards Lucas for leaving him without a word has faded into a dull ache and if anyone were to ask him whilst under truth serum if he loved anyone the name that would be instantly on his lips would be Lucas Thornton. There may be fifteen years between the end of their relationship and now, but without a shadow of a doubt, his heart belongs to Lucas and it always will.

He searched for him; oh, did he search, but to no avail. It frustrated him endlessly at the time; that he could not find one man, with all his technology and all his money, but Tony had never thought Lucas stupid. Perhaps he was just smarter than Tony had realised. In his more fanciful, desperate moments, Tony wondered if perhaps Lucas was MI6, or belonged to some other secret agency, and if that was why he had disappeared so thoroughly. He'd stopped looking eventually. He'd drowned himself in women and men and alcohol and endless partying and his infamy as a playboy reached new heights in the tabloids. Obadiah had hired Pepper as his new personal assistant and eventually his life without Lucas had reached some kind of equilibrium.

Now it's all come back, just because Tom looks like Lucas. Just because of one nightmare out of many. Tony shrinks the design he's working on and files it appropriately. With no small amount of hesitation, he rifles through his private server until he finds the appropriate file. Everything he has on Lucas is in this file and he spends some time going through it all, wondering whether his resources are now such that they might be able to find Lucas. He doubts it. However Lucas vanished all those years ago should not have stumped Tony Stark, even if JARVIS was only new and nowhere near the capabilities it has now. He drums his fingers on the surface of the holo-table as he contemplates starting over with his search. He thinks it might be like trying to dig out his heart with a rusty spoon, but it is too tempting. He wants to know what happened. He wants to know *why*.

And when those questions loom in front of him, he's never been able to resist them.

"J, you awake?"

"For you, sir, always. What can I do for you?"

Tony pauses before answering. Does he really want to do this?

"Start looking everywhere for Lucas Thornton, buddy," he orders.

"You wish to search for Mr. Thornton again? I believe your words to me last time were 'never again', sir," JARVIS responds dutifully. Tony sighs.

"I have to know, J. He just disappeared. I need to know - deserve to know why," Tony explains.

"Of course, sir. I shall begin the search anew," JARVIS acquiesces. Tony thinks for a moment then make a snap decision.

"And get me a facial comparison on Tom Larssen - run him against any database you can. I've just got this funny feeling about him."

"Now that you mention it, sir, I have something to show you..."

## **Chapter 7: On Horcruxes and Dark Magic**

Lucius Malfoy eyes the front page of the *Daily Prophet* in trepidation. The news is not something he had ever hoped to see. A quick glance at his wife across the table they are breakfasting at in her drawing room shows her sufficiently distracted by an article in *Enchanted Couture* as not to notice his unease. He puts the paper to one side and falls into thought as he sips at his morning coffee. The rich brew normally has him humming in approval of wherever the elves source the coffee from, but this morning he is too distracted to observe his morning ritual of coffee worship.

Draco had been to Diagon the previous morning to collect his supplies for Hogwarts, under much protestation that remaining at Hogwarts would not help him excel; that he would rather be going to the New York Academy of Magical Arts where he would surely learn more challenging magic, but Narcissa was not to be moved on the subject. Lucius has not been unaware of his son's growing distaste for Hogwarts (though it has never been so overtly verbal until now, something which puzzles Lucius), and he has considered offering Draco the choice of transferring, but he knows his wife prefers to have their only child closer to home. He did not think she would acquiesce to Draco's demand, but he had thought she might consider it a little.

She has been acting rather strangely recently – quieter than normal, more resolute and unyielding in her decisions. He has been unable to persuade her away from any of them which is odd. He eyes her over the rim of his coffee cup once more, allowing it to conceal the frown that briefly crosses his face. He wonders if her behaviour perhaps has something to do with the article in the newspaper. *But surely not?* Narcissa has never been given to displays of emotion, in whatever form they might take. She was the perfect pureblood wife,

no matter the occasion (its why Lucius' father chose her for him). This would be no different.

He drains his coffee and decides to head for his study. On his desk waits the paperwork his secretary delivered the previous afternoon as well as one or two lengthy new contracts for the Malfoy family businesses that he needs to read. He thinks perhaps that he will receive a missive from Fudge sometime soon, begging for his help (as is the norm for the hapless Minister) but more pressing on his mind is the matter of the front page news. Certainly he will need to devote some time to it and perhaps with greater urgency than the other matters require.

He presses a distracted kiss to the top of Narcissa's head which she barely acknowledges with a pleasant murmur that he cannot decipher, before gathering up his paper and refilled coffee cup. He walks briskly through the halls of Malfoy Manor, glancing at his pocket watch as he goes. He frowns at the timepiece, knowing that he will need to wait at least another hour before even attempting to firecall Severus.

As he enters his study, he closes the door behind him and locks it with a quick *colloportus* before casting several detection spells and a couple of security wards for good measure. Malfoy Manor maybe laden with all manner of wards, but that only afforded protection from the outside, *not* the inside. Lucius is a paranoid man and whilst he does not suspect his wife (yet), he is not sure he wants her to overhear the conversation he plans to have with Severus and possibly – *Asgard forbid* – Dumbledore. He settles into the chair behind his expansive oak desk and spreads the folded *Daily Prophet* out across the surface. He allows himself a brief scowl at the photograph before turning his eyes to reading the article once more.

*Breakout from Azkaban... sole escapee... Bellatrix Lestrange... suspected helper... no leads yet.*

He thinks back to June and the evening of the Dark Lord's resurrection. The events that had played out had been a surprise to all involved and all that had transpired had been denied by all involved except Potter - and even he had hidden things, according to Severus. Potter, who was then accused of the Diggory boy's murder and locked away and given the Kiss (though Lucius suspects he has escaped; with Loki as his father, it is unlikely he has been left to rot) without so much as a hint of a trial or the tiniest drop of Veritaserum. They had done that once before too, with Sirius Black, another Azkaban escapee still on the loose. Innocent, of course, unlike Bellatrix, but the Ministry has ever been blind to the need for proper procedure, no matter how much Lucius impresses the importance of it on Fudge. Although, perhaps if he had been a little more judicious with his application of blackmail and bribery, his words would have more of an effect on the helpless sod.

Lucius redirects his thoughts onto their original path and considers the evidence. Bellatrix has escaped Azkaban – her reasoning? The Dark Lord, no doubt. Perhaps she had heard rumours of his return, but not what had actually happened? Lucius glances briefly to the corner of his study that houses the symbol of the Norse deities and inclines his head in uneasy respect. It had taken some searching, but he had found his great grandfather's holy symbols deep in the recesses of the attic. Now he was certain of the truth of Norse myth, he would not ignore it – not after seeing the anger of the gods firsthand. It was an experience he is not likely to forget any time soon.

He takes a sip from his coffee and frowns at his thoughts. They are more distracted and on edge by this news than he had expected. He wishes time would speed up so he could speak with Severus, but he knows it is fruitless. Bellatrix is out there, no doubt seeking out the truth of what happened in the graveyard and once she has found it out? She will likely stop at nothing to see her lord resurrected properly and his reign resumed.

Lucius has no wish for any of this to happen. He cannot shake from his mind the words of damnation spoken to the Dark Lord in June. *Magic is a gift – one which you were given but have tainted.* He shudders to think of what became of the Dark Lord not long after that. He has taken that night as a warning and applied it liberally to all areas of his life. He is not going to go back on that. It would be safer not to, now that Loki has seen fit to involve himself in present day magical events. Lucius does not expect Loki to appear again – the god did not even broadcast his presence to the whole of wizardkind – but he would rather play it safe. The Aesir are not unaware of what passes in Wizarding society and Lucius would rather not court their attention. *Ergo, Bellatrix must be stopped.*

As he finishes the last of his cup of coffee, he checks the time once more and to his relief, Severus, man of habit that he is, would now have finished his early morning brewing and be settling down for a cup of tea and late breakfast. Lucius picks up the newspaper, casts a handful of floo powder into the fireplace and steps through, calling out his destination as he goes. Severus looks up in surprise from his desk as Lucius appears in the fireplace, spilling his cup of tea in the process. Lucius smirks at his friend's scowl, glad to know he could still surprise the man, for all his supposed brilliance as a spy.

"Lucius," Severus greets, frowning as he waves his wand to clean up the tea. Lucius nods in return and moves over the pass Severus the newspaper.

"I doubt you have seen this morning's news, given your obsessive need to brew at ridiculous hours?" He assumes. Severus scowls again and turns his attention to the front page of the newspaper. A series of rather foul words crosses the potions master's lips and Lucius lifts an eyebrow.

"My thoughts precisely," he comments. "Although I did not have the luxury of being able to say them aloud; I was breakfasting with Narcissa when I saw the headlines. I doubt I need to tell you that this is not good, old friend."

"Quite. I assume you have some knowledge or thoughts on what her goals might be?" Severus inquires politely.

"I do, and – much as it pains me to say this – I believe I need to speak with Dumbledore also."

Severus refrains from laughing, for which Lucius is grateful, but he does cross to the fireplace, grasping a handful of floo powder.

"That must have hurt, Lucius," he quips, before tossing the powder into the fire and calling out for Dumbledore. Lucius schools his face into an indifferent mask and resists the urge to fire a stinging hex at his friend. It would not make a good impression after all, and his relationship with Dumbledore is quite fractious. It would be best not to exacerbate it by attacking the man's members of staff.

Eventually, Dumbledore steps through the floo into Severus' office, looking not in the least surprised to see Lucius. The man's near omniscience has always made Lucius feel uncomfortable and edgy and he finds he already wants this over and done with as soon as possible. They retire to Severus' lounge area and settle in the chairs around the fire where he explains his thoughts to Dumbledore, leaving out, of course, the parts that involve Loki. The old professor frowns and twiddles his thumbs as he thinks. He turns his piercing blue eyes on Lucius and Lucius has to fight to meet them rather than shifting his gaze away.

"Lucius, I must have an oath from you before I continue," Dumbledore says quietly. Lucius and Severus frown.

"An oath? What kind of oath would you have of me?" Lucius questions cautiously.

"Oh, nothing too terrible. Not an unbreakable vow, if you're concerned about that," Dumbledore says candidly. "Rather I was thinking perhaps an oath on the Malfoy honour, or on your magic, or perhaps your son's life."

Lucius barely manages to keep a hold on his temper at Dumbledore's last suggestion. For the majority of the year, his son is in the care of this old man who has just casually bartered his life in an oath. He wants to rail at the old man's presumption but swallows his anger in favour of extracting more information about the required oath.

"And what are the requirements of this oath, should I make it?"

"Your silence on the matter of which I will speak to all but those in this room. Severus has already made this oath," Dumbledore says casually. Lucius shoots a look at his friend. Severus' eyebrows are raised in surprise and he looks as though he is about to speak, but bites his tongue instead.

"If Lucius swears the oath, Severus, we will amend yours to include him, of course."

Lucius drops his head to allow himself some time to think. Whatever information Dumbledore has, it is clearly important and clearly will reflect on Bellatrix's actions. If he is to make sure Bellatrix gets no further with what he assumes her goal is, then he will need the information Dumbledore has. He breathes deeply for a moment, thinks of his son and knows that is the only oath Dumbledore will accept.

"I swear on my son's life that the matter of which you, Albus Dumbledore, speak of to myself, Lucius Malfoy, and Severus Snape, will remain secret but for those in this room. So mote it be," Lucius swears, lifting his head and meeting Dumbledore's gaze. The old man looks surprised, but barely pauses before briefly taking a moment to amend Severus' own oath. He sends a message via house elf to McGonagall, asking her to cancel several meetings, before settling back in his seat and conjuring himself a tea set. Once he has a steaming cup of tea in his hands, he looks at Lucius once more.

"I believe, Lucius," Dumbledore begins, "that Voldemort created a total of seven horcruxes."

*Shit.*

\*



Potter,

*What in Merlin's name are you talking about? Your father is called Anthony? I thought your father was Loki! Surely you're not implying that both of your parents are male and one of them gave birth to you? I know you were brought up muggle, Potter, and who knows what happens in that part of the world, but that's not possible.*

*Though having said that, I did read a story where Loki gave birth to a horse, but he had shapeshifted into a mare at the time, so I didn't think it out of the realms of possibility. Do you think Loki had shapeshifted into a woman when he met your father? That would explain it, surely?*

*Just when I think I know the weirdest thing about you, Potter, something else comes along and proves me wrong. The Wizarding World doesn't know the half of it, I'm sure.*

*You have to tell me about your lessons with Loki. I saw what he did in my father's pensieve memory - I have never seen that kind of magic before. And if 'most' humans aren't capable of it, then that means some are and I bet I'm one of those. Malfoys always defy expectations and are exceptional in everything they do. I need to learn this, Potter. If my mother wasn't demanding I stayed in Hogwarts for the rest of my education, I'd transfer to the New York Academy of Magical Arts, visit you on the weekends and demand that Loki teach me as well. (You are in New York, aren't you? I assume you are, because you mentioned it in passing in your last letter.)*

*I visited Diagon Alley yesterday for my Hogwarts supplies. Given its the year of our OWLs, I was expecting a more challenging book for DADA, but this one is useless. 'Defensive Magical Theory' is all well and good, but isn't the point of the class to learn practical DADA? I've read the introduction and it is mind-numbingly boring. Merlin, its like listening to Professor Binns - no, its worse. At least the text for potions looks challenging. Uncle Sev will no doubt be making us brew harder potions than will be on the exam to ensure we are capable of passing - though I wouldn't hold out much hope for Longbottom. Or yourself, if you were here.*

*I saw the Weasleys and Granger. Some of the Weasleys looked particularly sad - and by that I mean upset, Potter, before you rant at me about deriding your favourite set of gingers. I suppose they might be missing you. Granger was officious, as always, though she did practically drag Weasley into Quality Quidditch Supplies, which surprised me. I had assumed she avoided the shop like the plague, given her complete lack of sporting interest and ability. Perhaps she was trying to cheer Weasley up. Not what I would have chosen; surely Quidditch would only remind Weasley of you. Still, whether they believe you did it or not, some of them appear to miss you. ~~I miss you too.~~*

*(Just to clarify: I don't. Miss you, that it. Why would I miss someone I hate? Ridiculous. Hogwarts will be ~~so boring~~ better without you.)*

*In other news, there's been another escape from Azkaban. Seems the Ministry are useless at guarding that place. Two breakouts in the last three years? Anyway, it appears Bellatrix Lestrange, an insane supporter of the Dark Lord (though I think 'insane' is perhaps a rather redundant qualifier given that supporting that Dark Lord is insane), is now on the loose. She's responsible for Longbottom's parents, you know? She's also my aunt, though*

*I'm glad I don't remember her. I can't imagine spending time with her would be enjoyable, given her propensity for extensive use of the cruciatus curse. I hope she stays clear of the Manor.*

*Anyway, got to go. Blaise has arrived for an afternoon of flying. ~~I'd much rather be flying with you; at least you challenge me.~~ And make sure you send extensive explanations of what Loki's teaching you - I demand it, Potter!*

*Still hatefully,*

*Malfoy*

\*

"I have enrolled you in a local school, Hávarðr," Loki announces as he enters the apartment. Harry is sitting on the sofa, poking at his Starkpad. He pauses and looks up at Loki in surprise.

"What? I thought you were teaching me," he protests, scowling just a little. Loki smiles and shakes his head in amusement.

"Why is it that children are eager to avoid learning? Do you wish to stumble through life with no knowledge whatsoever? It will not make your life easier, I assure you," Loki replies. "And I will be teaching you magic - and an amount of Asgardian science and history, of course - but that is no reason to neglect your Midgardian education. Your father, in fact, is quite smart."

As Loki expected, the mention of Harry's father grabs his attention immediately. He hates to manipulate Harry in this way, but he would be remiss as a parent if he allowed Harry to laze around and avoid learning. It would not honour Tony, either, if Harry were to never achieve his full potential on Midgard.

"My father?"

"Yes, Hávarðr. He was very interested in science and engineering and excelled at both," Loki explains, hoping Harry won't pry any further. There is only so much Loki can say without giving away Tony's identity. After a moment, Harry's shoulder slump and Loki knows he's made a misstep. He had thought he was getting better at reading his son, but perhaps not. A month is not that long, after all.

"I've never been very good at school," Harry mutters. "Not smart enough, I suppose."

Loki sets his keys down on the coffee table and lowers himself onto the sofa next to Harry. Resting a gentle hand on Harry's knee, he waits until his son looks at him. Harry's eyes are full of misery and Loki can see a few tears gathering. He sighs, and inwardly chastises himself for approaching this incorrectly.

"Hávarðr, I am sure that is not the case. You are intelligent and you excel at magic. You are coping with what I am teaching you far better than I expected, given your previous reliance on a wand."

“But its the theory - the essays and understanding the concepts. That’s the hard part!” Harry protests. “And it wasn’t just at Hogwarts. I went to muggle school too, when I was younger, and I was awful there too. I had to be!”

*Had to be? Hávarðr had to be awful?*

“You had to be awful, Hávarðr? Why?”

Harry looks away, shifting uncomfortably on the sofa and clearly contemplating lying. Loki waits patiently for Hávarðr to speak. This, at least, is something he does know. He has learned over the last month that being patient with his son will often mean that their conversations are more productive and it encourages Hávarðr to be more honest with Loki than he instinctually wants to be.

“The Dursleys,” Harry says, as if that is sufficient enough an explanation. Loki thinks they are the humans that ended up looking after Harry when the Potters died, but he is aware that *looking after* is not particularly accurate in this case. Harry has thus far refused to share much about his time with them, but Loki will eventually persuade the facts from him and then there will be retribution. The Dursleys will pay, Loki will make sure of it.

“What about the Dursleys, Hávarðr?”

“They were angry when I did better than Dudley. So I stopped,” Harry admits. Loki thinks something is missing from his short explanation, but he leaves it for now. He settles back onto the sofa and pulls Harry closer, wrapping his arms around his son in a hug.

“And at your magical school?”

“I had a friend. She was really smart. Got really disappointed when she didn’t get top of the class. So I just... carried on, I guess,” Harry says quietly. “It was easier to not stand out too. Especially when they already believed I was some kind of saviour.”

Harry falls silent then and shifts so his head is resting on Loki’s lap. Loki allows the silence to continue for a while as he thinks. He strokes Harry’s hair gently, infusing his touch with a calming magic to help Harry control his emotions. After a while, Harry’s breathing evens out, and whilst he is not asleep, Loki knows he is close to state required for their meditation sessions.

“Are we meditating now?” Harry says, voice quiet and even, almost sleepy.

“No, Hávarðr, not now,” Loki murmurs. “But I do want you to listen to me.”

Harry nods, and closes his eyes.

“Your father would be proud of you if he knew you. He would be as proud of you as I am, because you are our son and *that* is what matters - not what you are capable of,” Loki begins. “That said, he would wish for you to excel in all that you do. All parents wish that of their children - that they would excel and that they would be happy. And that is what I wish for you also. You do not have to hold yourself back here, nor will you need to at your new

Midgardian school. You will not be punished for doing well. And if you are struggling, I will help you. Your father would too, if he were here.”

Harry opens his eyes and stares up at Loki. There are tears in them, as there were before, but these are different, Loki thinks. Before Harry can speak, he continues.

“But above all, I want you to be happy, Hávarðr. You are lonely, with just me and your letter-writing friend for company - don’t look at me with that incredulous gaze; of course I know about him - and going to school will allow you to make friends of your own age. If it doesn’t work, we will try something different, but I hope this will help you be happier, Hávarðr.”

Harry is crying now and reaches his arms around Loki in some kind of awkward embrace, holding tightly with heretofore unseen strength that surprises Loki a little. Harry’s face is buried in Loki’s stomach, but he can still hear the words his son is speaking, the Elderspeak flawless as it falls from Harry’s mouth.

*“Love you, Móðir.”*

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Harry doesn’t expect to fall asleep, but as close to that state of meditation as he was, and with how emotional Loki’s words made him feel, he should have expected it really. He wakes with his head still resting on Loki’s lap, a dark green blanket over his body. Loki is reading; his book, thick and written in runes Harry cannot read yet, hovers nearby. Every now and then, the pages turn by themselves with a the smallest twitch of Loki’s left forefinger. Loki’s right hand is placed gently on Harry’s stomach, rubbing soothingly. Harry remains silent for a little while, wondering how long it will be before Loki notices he is awake, and how long he can get away with being this close. It is something he hasn’t really experienced before - family being willingly close and offering each other physical comfort. Oh, he witnessed it at the Weasleys and had been subject to a few bone-crunching hugs from Mrs Weasley, but he’d never experienced it like this. Casual comfort, willingly given and given without prompting. He closes his eyes again and wonders if he can fall back to sleep, but no such luck. Loki’s right hand leaves his stomach and Harry feels fingertips gently tracing the scar on his forehead. He cannot hide his flinch and Loki’s fingers move away instantly. Harry opens his eyes to find Loki watching him, curiously.

“Does it pain you?” Loki asks. Harry thinks about lying, but wonders if Loki might somehow be able to help with the pain he experiences. He’d dealt with Voldemort, after all, and this scar was from Voldemort, so perhaps Loki knew a way to deal with this too.

“Yes. Its from Voldemort. I got it when he killed my parents - sorry, the Potters - and then tried to kill me. Sometimes my nightmares make it hurt. Sometimes it hurts all on its own. It hurt when Voldemort touched it that night in the graveyard,” Harry explains. Loki looks at it thoughtfully, before his gaze returns to the book and he flicks through several pages, apparently searching for something. Harry wishes he could read the book.

“Why?” He asks Loki. “What’s wrong with it? I thought it was just a curse scar.”

Loki sighs and with a flick of his fingers the book floats to rest on the coffee table.

“May I?” He asks, both hands hovering over Harry’s forehead. Harry nods nervously and tries not to flinch as gentle fingers touch first at the area around the scar and then trace the red lines of it.

“If it was just a curse scar, it would not have pained you for this long or in the ways it does,” Loki explains. “The first week you were here, I looked at it while you were sleeping. It has some strange, tainted magic in it. I wanted to take a closer look, but given the nature of it, doing that whilst you were asleep would not be advisable. It is dark magic, black and powerful and it has no place there. I would rid you of it, if I can.”

Harry can feel his heart racing at Loki’s words. There is something in him? In his scar? Something tainted and black and powerful. Harry feels nauseous and terrified at the thought. What had Voldemort done to him all those years ago? Has it even been there all that time? Or did Voldemort do it in the graveyard when he *touched* Harry?

“Please,” he hears himself begging. “Please, get rid of it, *Móðir*.”

Loki shushes him gently.

“It is alright, Hávarðr. It is alright, I promise. I will remove it from you, but it may take time and research. If you are willing, I can look now?”

Harry sits up, nodding. There is no way he wants this thing inside him for longer than necessary.

“What do you need to do?” He asks nervously. He watches as Loki stands, rolling up the sleeves of the loose fitting green tunic he is wearing.

“I need you to remain as calm and as still as possible, Hávarðr. Perhaps if you begin to meditate as in our lessons, that would help. I will then draw out an image of your magical core and that will likely give me enough to work with at present,” Loki explains, moving around the other side of the coffee table to where Harry sits. Harry nods and swallows his nervousness as he closes his eyes and begins as Loki taught him.

It had been difficult, learning to meditate. His mind doesn’t stop easily, always hurtling at a hundred miles an hour (and apparently just like his father’s mind). He had thought Loki would get impatient with him and how much he had struggled at first, but instead Loki had calmly explained different techniques for Harry to try until he found one that worked. He focuses on his breathing now, not on controlling it, but on the feeling of his chest rising and falling, of the air moving as he exhales and inhales, of the quiet sigh he makes as he breathes. As he continues, his focus narrowing on his breathing, his racing mind, his fear, his nervousness - all of it seems to float away and he finds himself within touching distance of his magical core. It is then that he vaguely registers Loki whispering a spell and he feels his core hum in response.

“Open your eyes, Hávarðr,” Loki murmurs.

As Harry opens his eyes, he sees himself - or an outline of himself - edged in greenish-gold with large flecks of red peppering the wisps of magic that make up the ghostly, ethereal form between him and Loki. It is breathtakingly beautiful.

“This is the image of your magical core,” Loki explains. “The colours are your own and whenever you use your magic, it will manifest in those colours. That is why you always see green when I use my magic, despite the spell I am casting.”

Harry breathes deeply and lets his eyes roam over the image. The flecks of red are restless, flitting around in the steadier greenish-gold. The greenish-gold pulses gently, occasionally flicking back at the red flecks. It looks mischievous. After a moment, his eyes fix on the black colour where his forehead would be. Loki is already looking at it. It looks poisonous, and almost as if it has dulled the colour around it and is sucking the life from that particular part of his magical core. He wonders if it will spread to the rest of his core and feels the fear rise in him again. The image of his core flickers as his breathing increases.

“Peace, Hávarðr. It will be alright,” Loki murmurs. Harry closes his eyes for a moment and makes a concerted effort to steady his breathing. At Loki’s gentle encouragement, he opens his eyes again.

“I thought it would be a geas,” Loki says, his own magic encircling the black patch. It seems to dart in and out, plucking at the darkness. The darkness fights back, as though it was a cornered dog, snarling and snapping at an extended hand. “If it were a geas, I would at least know how to deal with it.”

“What is it?” Harry asks. His voice sounds calmer than he feels.

“I am not sure, but- oh,” Loki halts and his face turns dark and angry and Harry involuntarily thinks of the grainy videos of the invasion he’d found. He struggles to remain calm as the air in the room becomes oppressive and heavy with Loki’s magic. Loki is furious and Harry knows it’s not directed at him, but at whatever is in his head but he cannot help but shrink back into the sofa, pulling his legs close to his chest and making himself as small as possible. When the image of his core flickers violently, Loki seems to remember himself and the atmosphere lightens. Loki’s face still looks dark and Harry doesn’t dare ask what is going on.

“That,” Loki eventually snaps, pointing at the poisonous black mass. “That is a piece of soul.”

Harry doesn’t need to ask who it belongs to. He already knows.

## **Chapter 8: On Gringotts and Nosey Parkers**

Her body quivers at the thought of it - the thought of *him*, restored to his full power and godlike form. She hears his voice, like silk, in her mind, calling her name with such sweetness and desire and she closes her eyes and imagines it - *him*, her beautiful lord. She sees his elegance and benevolence, remembering the sibilant sound of the spells he wove, the feel of his *cruciatuus* coursing through her *just so* and she cannot help the jolt of arousal that creeps up on her. She licks her lips in anticipation, laying back on her bed, fingers fluttering over herself, ghosting over her breasts, tweaking her nipples through the lace of her robes. *Oh*, his fingers would know just the right amount of pressure to exert on her pain-wracked body, he could bring her to such heights of pleasure that her useless husband never could. She hauls up the skirts of her robes and rubs harshly against her soaked silk of her underwear, teeth biting down into her lower lip as she imagines *his* hands against her, his

magic coursing through her. To know his touch again, to have his delicious tortures wrack her body once more... the thought of it sends her over the edge and she shakes, noiseless, breath catching in her throat, praises to her Lord a litany in her mind.

As she comes down, she licks her lips and grins wildly. She knows her next step and she will delay no longer. Apparently she should be focused on recovering from Azkaban, but there is little time for that – not when her lord is out there somewhere and is in dire need of her service. She knows precisely what he needs from her; *she* was his most trusted after all, not her snivelling brother-in-law. She was the one he chose to tell about his *long-term plan*; she was the one he chose to trust with the safety of his *artefacts*, and now she is free, she can finally restore her lord to his full glory and power.

It is early in the morning when she slips the wards on the safe house she has been staying in with little difficulty. Apparating to Knockturn Alley, she ducks through the streets, careful to observe her surroundings as she heads towards Gringotts. Goblins are not overly bound to Wizarding Law, Bellatrix has found, so when she arrives and demands to be taken to her vault, they do not summon the Aurors and simply do as asked.

Making sure her hood is secure over her head, and that the scarf she wears conceals all but her eyes, she follows the goblin to the cart. She is impatient throughout the journey to her vault, but it is one of the most secure therefore it is deeper than the rest. The only two vaults that are more secure than the Lestrange one are the Black and Malfoy vaults. A sneer twists her lips as she thinks of her cousin and his betrayal of the family. She wishes she could have had a chance to kill him in Azkaban, before he escaped. *Wretched, flea-bitten mongrel.*

The goblin guides her past the dragon and she pays it no mind. Some would quail and be terrified at the mere thought of being this close to a dragon; Bellatrix knows no such fear. She does not even think she knows the meaning of the word fear. The goblin begins the process of opening the vault and she provides a little of her blood when required and finally the heavy stone doors open. With delight and anticipation coursing through her, she picks her way through the vault, disabling the traps she put in place in case of thieves. As she approaches where she had left the artefact, she stops in her tracks. It is not there.

Fury floods her veins and she rushes to the shelf where she had placed it. All the other items are there, but the cup is not. She flings the other objects to the ground in white-hot rage, uncaring of whether they broke or not, and whirls on the goblin standing at the vault door.

“You, goblin! Why has my vault been broken into?” She demands, pointing her wand at him. He eyes her in disdain and sneers.

“Madam Lestrange, there has not been a break in at Gringotts for years. Your vault is the same as it was since you last visited,” he replies. Bellatrix stalks closer, twirling her wand between the fingers of her right hand.

“The object I placed here under protections of my own devising as well as your own has gone. Where is it, if my vault has not been broken into?” She hisses, glaring down at the goblin. She flicks her wand in irritation and blood pours from a cut on its cheek. Normally she would take pleasure at the sight of it, but her fury is white-hot and blinding. “You will tell me. Who has been down here?”

“The Malfoys made their weekly visit to their own vault on Tuesday just gone. No one has entered your vault, I assure you,” the goblin replies, a little less assuredly than before. Bellatrix snarls and hisses a spell that has the goblin writhing on the floor in an instant, mouth open in noiseless pain. She holds him under it as she spits insults, rage boiling in her blood, before she sends a slashing spell at his throat. She leaves him for dead and returns to the surface, uncaring of who would see her now. Blinded by her fury, she whirls and spins as she fires spells to cause chaos and pain in the main hall of Gringotts. Goblins and wizards and witches alike fall to pain and bloody death and she revels in the sound and sight of it all. Her rage fades into obscene delight as she strings up goblins by their entrails one by one before disappearing.

The cup may be gone, but six others remain. Once her lord has risen, she will find who took the cup and present them as sacrifice to her lord. What pleasure he will take in exacting revenge. She licks her lips at the thought as she arrives back at the safe house. *What pleasure indeed.*

\*

*Malfoy,*

*God, I miss flying, you jammy bastard.*

*You're headed back to Hogwarts next week, right? I thought I'd miss it, but now that I think about it, I really don't. I miss my friends ~~and you~~ but there is really nothing else about it I could miss. I mean, really, think about it, when did I ever have a normal, non-life-threatening experience at Hogwarts? Dumbledore really should do something about the safety and security there. I almost died four times in the four years I was there. Maybe it'll be safer for everyone now that I'm not there.*

*Loki's signed me up for a local school - muggle, of course. ~~I'm terrified.~~ I suppose I should go, but its probably going to be so ~~difficult~~ boring. I mean, I've been in muggle school before, and it wasn't nearly as interesting as Hogwarts. I didn't nearly die at muggle school, for one thing. ~~Just got chased by Dudley and his mates.~~ I'll let you know how it is - though I'm sure you don't need any more fuel to you fire against muggles.*

*By the way, you seem way too interested in the whole 'Loki is my mother' thing. Creepy, Malfoy. Really creepy. But if you must know, yes. I have two male parents. Yes, Loki gave birth to me. No, he was not a woman when he was with my father. No, I don't really know how it works and I'm not sure I want to. Ugh. I can't believe I am talking about this with you of all people. Though I suppose I really don't have anyone else to talk to right now, so you'll have to do.*

*So far my lessons with Loki consist of meditation and getting in touch with my magical core. Last week, he made me meditate, then drew out an image of my magical core. I've never seen anything like it. Bloody hell, one day I might be able to do that. I mean, I thought magic was pretty amazing when I first found out about it when I was eleven, but this is something else. Loki does magic like he breathes, Malfoy. He barely thinks about what he's doing and all without a wand. And I get to learn how to do it too! Once I've learned how to interact with my magical core, that is. ~~I hope I'm good enough.~~*



~~Are the Weasleys alright? Is Hermione Shit. I don't want to know. What's the point in asking. They haven't even tried to find out what happened to me.~~

*Bellatrix Lestrange? Neville mentioned her once, I think. And she's your aunt? And I thought my ~~relatives~~ adopted relatives were awful. I hope the Ministry catch her. What am I saying? The Ministry are hopeless. Do you know what she's up to? Silly question really, she's probably trying to bring back Voldemort. Shit. She's going to be coming after me, isn't she? Bloody hell. Why can't I catch a break? ~~First Loki finds a piece of Voldemort's soul latched on to mine, and now this.~~*

*Let me know what the DADA teacher is like. Sounds like you're in for another awful year. Glad I'm not there. And I am SO glad I don't have to have Snape teach me any more. And 'Uncle Sev'? Really? You're related to the man? That explains the favouritism.*

*And hatefully? Really? Go on, admit you actually kind of like me, Malfoy. Admit we're actually friends, now. ~~Because, really, you're my only friend at the moment and isn't that just sad.~~*

*Anyway, enjoy the dangers - sorry, wonders of Hogwarts...*

*Potter*

\*

Harry turns down Loki's offer to drop him off at school on the first day. He is fifteen years old, after all, and he can do it himself, even if his life has been turned upside down beyond all recognition in the last few months. There is no ride on the Hogwarts Express this year to soothe any nerves he has about going back, but there is a ride on the subway and the rattle of the train and jostle of people in the early morning rush gets him out of his own head for a while. He almost misses his stop, but manages to squeeze off at the last minute, just before the doors close. He has to run though, because there's still a ten minute walk to the school campus and he's got five minutes before he is officially late. He wishes he could apparate, or do that teleporting thing he's seen Loki do a few times, but unfortunately for him he doesn't know how to do either and doing it in the middle of a busy New York street would be inadvisable.

He makes it to Midtown High School one minute before the bell rings, and fortunately, the woman in the office takes pity on him and helps him find his homeroom. As she introduces him to the teacher, he hovers in the doorway nervously, feeling the eyes of everyone in the class. He's never had to do this before and it is terrifying. He's going to stick out like a sore thumb, even with his new, fashionable wardrobe and Loki teaching him how to semi-tame his hair. He is going to be so far behind in all his classes and everyone is going to think he's an idiot.

The teacher at the front of the room, Mrs Green, points at an empty seat towards the back of the room and he drops into it, slouching and hoping people will soon stop staring at him.

When she hands out the schedules, he stares at it in bewilderment for a while before the boy in the seat next to him leans over.

“We got the same first class; I’ll help you,” he whispers. Mrs Green shoots a glare in their direction.

“Mr Parker, you can get to know Mr Larssen later in the day, or in detention, if you continue,” she says with an exasperated look on her face.

“So-sorry Mrs Green,” the boy says, shifting back so he’s in his own space. Harry offers him a grin. Being threatened with detention in the first half hour of the year isn’t so bad. It almost feels familiar - the only difference is Snape isn’t the one threatening him. A little more at ease, Harry waits for the other boy when the bell rings and finds himself dragged out into the hall way.

“I’m Peter, by the way,” he says as he shoulders his bag.

“Harry, and thanks for the offer,” Harry replies. “I would be lost somewhere otherwise. I got lost on my first day at my last school too.”

“Its not so hard, once you get used to it. And dude, your accent! Where’re you from?” Peter demands eagerly.

“Oh, um, England. Moved here this summer with my mo- with my dad, Tom,” Harry says, distractedly. The halls here are narrower and busier than Hogwarts’ halls and are lined with student lockers making it more even more difficult to move down the corridors without bumping into someone. He mentally curses as he realises he almost called Loki his mother and had then awkwardly added in Loki’s fake name. No child would ever do that. They’d just call him ‘dad’. Peter looks at him oddly for a moment but then carries on as if Harry hadn’t given the most awkward answer ever.

“How come? I mean, I hear England is a pretty great place. And, you know, there’s been like zero alien attacks there at least,” Peter replies. “Oh, except that one in London that Thor was there for. Looked like a giant game of *Portal*, which was pretty cool.”

“Um... my dad’s work moved him here,” Harry lies, thinking on his feet. He and Loki had discussed what information he could use when asked questions, and they’d agreed on using Loki’s fake name to enrol Harry here, but Harry had never thought he’d be asked about why they moved here. He hopes he can bluff his way through that.

“You seen the sights yet? Because I could show you some really great places to get food or to hang out if you wanted to,” Peter rambles and Harry wonders if that’s a thing - if Peter just talks and talks until he eventually runs out of words.

“That sounds cool,” Harry says, unsure. “I mean, I don’t really know anyone here except my dad and I’m probably really behind on work so I’ll have to spend a lot of time catching up, but-”

“Dude, I’ll help you catch up. I mean, your school back in England couldn’t have been that different, right?”

“You have no idea” Harry mutters as he follows Peter into their first class of the day.

Algebra turns out to be easier than Harry thought it would be. Its logical and doesn't take much effort to think through applying formulae when necessary. The sciences were similar, but there is a lot of background information Harry is missing which he needs to catch up on. English and Spanish cause him the most trouble - for some reason he can understand the Spanish perfectly when the teacher is speaking it, and it looks like English on the page in front of him, but he utterly fails to speak it himself when asked. It is beyond frustrating for both himself and his teacher and he is sure his classmates are laughing at him throughout the entire humiliating experience. English bores him to death and he's already been given an essay as homework which will no doubt take him *forever* because this time he doesn't have Hermione telling him what to write.

He doesn't share all of his classes with Peter - Peter is apparently smart enough to be in a couple of the advanced classes in some subjects, but they meet up again at lunch and Peter shows him around some more of the school. He meets a few others, including a boy with the ridiculous name 'Flash' who shoves Peter into a locker in the morning and throws a basketball at his head at lunch. Peter just rolls his eyes and sighs and tells Harry that Flash had been doing that since middle school. Flash reminds Harry of Malfoy, only Malfoy is a lot smarter than Flash appears to be. Harry grins to himself at the thought and wonders when he'll get his next letter from Malfoy.

"So what are you actually called, if Harry's not your name?" Peter asks, pulling Harry out of his thoughts as they walk back towards the subway at the end of the day. Harry groans. He hadn't known until the first lesson, but Loki had enrolled him under his real first name which every single one of his teachers failed to pronounce correctly, repeatedly trying until he had to intervene and tell them to just call him Harry.

"My real name is Hávarðr, but it has weird letters in it, so no one reading it can ever pronounce it," Harry explains.

"Ha-var-thor?" Peter tries. Harry grins.

"Close enough. Harry'll do though."

"But that's not an English name. You said you were from England," Peter points out.

"Its Norse. My dad's family are from that area of the world. They're keen on using old, traditional names," Harry lies. Peter gives him a strange look, almost like he can see through Harry's lie, but then he shrugs.

"Cool," he says, before launching into an explanation of some internship at Stark Industries he's applying for. Harry listens with half an ear as they walk, hoping that he's made a friend here. Writing to Malfoy is great and the letters he gets are funnier and friendlier than he ever thought he could be with Malfoy, but having an actual friend he can hang out with and talk to face to face would be really good. Loki was right when he said Harry needed friends and he hopes that Peter will be one of them.

They part at the subway, taking different trains home, and Harry thinks about how weird it is to be going home and not up to a dorm room with his mates at the end of the school day. When he arrives home, Loki has his nose in some giant tome, a notebook hovering just by him, notes appearing on the page whenever Loki flicks his fingers.

“How was school?” Loki asks, looking up with a smile. Harry drops his bag on the floor and falls face first on the sofa. He feels tired and worn out, but happy.

“Good. I think I made a friend,” he says, voice muffled by the sofa cushions. He turns his head sideways and watches as Loki’s smile turns proud. Loki moves to lean down and press a gentle kiss to Harry’s head.

“Of course you did,” Loki replies. “Now, I assume you have homework?”

Harry groans. So *this* is what having a parent is like.

\*

They lie in Tony’s vast bed together, sleepy in the hazy afterglow of sex. Loki is watching Tony discreetly from beneath almost-closed eyes. Tony is older, yes, and there is more grief in his face than there used to be, but there is still evidence of the carefree, playful young man Loki fell in love with years ago. He wishes he could still be Lucas – or better yet, himself – but he knows it would only mean being banned from Tony’s presence forever. Tony is not a man who suffers betrayal in any form and Loki is certain that is how his actions would be viewed.

They’ve spent the evening together today, having drinks at a dive bar near the Tower and observing the drunken idiots around them. Neither of them drank too much, but Tony had just enough to loosen his tongue. He’d talked a little about the Avengers and his break-up with Pepper, but not once did he mention Lucas Thornton. He wasn’t terribly melancholy in his tipsy state, but it showed through a little towards the end of the evening. Loki had distracted him with lewd suggestions for how they could finish their evening and Tony had grinned at him wolfishly in response. They had stumbled from the bar, hands all over each other, tugging at clothing as they fell into the waiting car. Tony’s driver had politely done his job, even as Loki sucked Tony off in the back of the car between the bar and the Tower. They had progressed from there to Tony’s penthouse apartment and an enthusiastic couple of rounds ensued.

Tony is almost asleep, but he turns his head slightly and offers Loki a cheeky grin. It only makes Loki want to kiss Tony all the more, but in his current form – Tom Larssen, *acquaintance-with-benefits* – kisses are sparse. Sex is plentiful, but the tender kisses of lovers are few and far between. Instead they devour one another, nipping and biting, but the gentle kisses that Lucas and Tony once shared are nowhere to be seen. Loki misses them; misses rolling over half-asleep in the middle of the night and exchanging lazy kisses with Tony as he joins him in bed, fresh from the workshop and smelling of motor-oil.

Still, he has to be grateful for what he has. It is dangerous – Tony has already asked him if he knew a *Lucas Thornton*; has already noticed some unnerving similarities, and Loki wonders (not for the first time) if he should have made Tom’s appearance more of a contrast to Lucas’. He supposes he knew what worked for Tony and stuck with that. Perhaps Loki had thought that someone so startlingly similar to his old lover would catch Tony’s interest just enough for it to lead elsewhere. Loki knows he should have considered the dangers more, instead of giving in to sentiment.

Tony is asleep now, giving soft, little huffs of air that are not quite snores. Loki dares to lean closer and presses a tender kiss to the corner of Tony's eye. He whispers endearments in Eldertongue, not risking using Allspeak for the chances of Tony waking and realising what's going on.

*"If only you knew, my dearest Tony, my dear heart, of how much our son has grown. He is strong, full of magic and he understanding of science, although hindered by his previous education shows great promise. He is already excelling at school, dear heart, and I think that were he truly put to the test, he would show an intelligence far greater than he believes he has. He is full of life, Tony, and he reminds me of you in so many ways. I wish you could know him. I wish I had not been so foolish."*

Tony shifts and rolls over slightly and Loki pauses in his words, heart hammering in his chest.

"You say something, Lucas?" Tony murmurs sleepily. Loki's heart clenches.

"It's Tom," he responds, hating himself. "And no."

\*

Tom leaves shortly after that, and Tony feigns sleep as the other man dresses and exits the Tower penthouse. When he hears the elevator moving, he sits up.

"Anything, J?" He asks, pulling up a holoscreen.

"Similar to his previous visit, sir," JARVIS replies and the security footage of the last couple of hours begins playing. As much as Tony would love to watch a replay of their exploits tonight, he is looking for something else and fast-forwards until he reaches the moment he wants. He watches as he dozes off, and then Tom props himself up on one elbow, looking down at Tony with a strange expression on his face. It looks a lot like tenderness, maybe even *love* and Tony swallows hard at the sight of it. Tom's expression reminds him of Lucas and he fights sick feeling in his stomach as he watches Tom lean down and press a gentle kiss to the corner of his eye. JARVIS boosts the volume and then Tony is hearing that strange language JARVIS had shown him before. It has a strange lilt to it; it falls from Tom's tongue in a way that implies he was born speaking it. But Tom is apparently British, with the accent to match, even though his surname is *Larssen*. Of all the languages JARVIS has scanned this against, it is similar enough to something Scandinavian. Given Tom's potential Scandinavian roots, Tony had wondered whether it was a rare dialect, but no matches had come up in JARVIS' searches of Scandinavian dialects.

"We need to work on some way of translating this shit," Tony mutters, watching as he interrupts Tom. Tom's face does something strange as Tony mistakes him for Lucas, which has him rewinding, zooming in and pausing. Tom looks heartbroken, Tony thinks, and knows that if that's the case, he should immediately end what is going on between them. If Tom is in love with him, then he's barking up the wrong tree and Tony needs to stop it. But there is something weird about Tom that Tony wants to solve and he's never been good with abandoning mysteries like this. There is an answer to all this, and Tony needs to find it.

“Who are you?” He murmurs, staring at Tom’s face. It is haunting in its strange familiarity. He looks similar to Lucas, but there are shades of someone else in there, someone Tony knows he has met but he just can’t quite put his finger on who it could be.

“Sir, if I may, perhaps a DNA test would be the next step,” JARVIS suggests. Tony frowns.

“DNA? JARVIS, we don’t have anything to - oh,” Tony grins and leans over to the small bin at the side of the bed. He plucks out the used condom.

## **Chapter 9: On Evil Overmoms and Locketts**

When the end of the summer comes, Draco finds himself boarding the train to Hogwarts once more. His mother had put her foot down at the idea of Draco going abroad to study and insisted he remain in Hogwarts. Even with his father’s attempts to persuade her to consider it, she had been insistent that he remain at Hogwarts. So here he was, on the train and heading for another year at the most famous British Wizarding school. Draco sullenly greets his friends as they enter the compartment he has acquired and settles into his seat, staring out of the window. He would much rather be in New York right now, at a more prestigious Wizarding school and with access to the greatest sorcerer in the Nine Realms on the weekends. He sighs moodily and tunes into his friends’ conversation. Daphne Greengrass and Theo Nott are discussing events from the summer and Blaise Zabini is watching Draco coolly. His scrutiny is a little unnerving. Eventually, Blaise speaks.

"What's with you, Draco? Normally we can't get you to shut up after the summer holidays," Blaise comments. Daphne and Theo pause in their conversation and stare at Draco, waiting for him to respond. Draco stares out of the window for a moment before sighing.

"I should be in New York right now. I would be, if it weren't for my mother," he explains. They eye him as though he has gone mad.

"New York? Why would you be in New York when school is about to begin?" Theo looks bewildered. The others nod in agreement with him.

"I was hoping to transfer to the New York Academy of Magical Arts. My father thought it was a good idea, but *mother*..."

"So... you weren't going to come back to Hogwarts this year?"

"No. But mother denied my request and said I would finish my education at Hogwarts," Draco says irritably. His mother is being unreasonable, he feels. He wishes he could reveal the whole truth to her and his father, about Potter and that he would be studying with *Loki*, but with Bellatrix on the loose, he thinks that’s probably a bad idea. Harry - *Potter* was right in his letter - Bellatrix is probably after him.

"Well, good for us!" Blaise comments with a grin. "Bad for you though. Why did you want to move there though?"

“Their whole educational system is superior to Hogwarts and some of their professors are world experts in their field.”

Daphne and Blaise look back at him blankly, but Theo is getting excited.

“They have some of the most famous magical researchers in the world. I wanted to go there, but both father and mother agreed that I should go to Hogwarts.”

Theo continues to expound on the brilliance of NYAMA, but Draco couldn't care less. They might be better than Hogwarts overall, but his reasons were entirely based around a desire to have Loki tutor him. He retreats into himself and thinks of the letters he has been exchanging with Harry - *Potter*. For once it had been nice to have a... *friend*... who was different than his usual companions. Their exchanges have been refreshing and funny and Draco thinks he might be Potter's only point of contact outside of Loki. He resumes ignoring the others as the train ride progresses, mentally composing his next letter to Harry - *Potter!* His internal solitude is interrupted about halfway through the train ride when he overhears a couple of students talking about Potter and the death of Cedric Diggory. He smoothly rises to his feet and slides open the compartment door to sneer at Zacharias Smith and Ernie Macmillan.

“If you want to gossip about Potter, get lost,” he says. “I don't have the patience to suffer idiots today.”

“I would have thought you'd be ecstatic, Malfoy,” Smith starts, grinning. Draco thinks its meant to be in solidarity, especially when Smith accompanies it with a little elbow nudge. Draco shifts sideways slightly and looks down his nose at the irritating Hufflepuff.

“I am not so lacking in manners and class as to deride someone after their unfortunate death,” he comments, sneering at the two stunned Gryffindors in the doorway. “*Especially* when their guilt was not proven.”

Smith and Macmillan look incredulously at him.

“What rock have you been hiding under this summer, Malfoy? It was *obvious* that Potter killed Cedric - and probably because Cedric had won or because he wanted Cho to be *his* girlfriend!” Smith exclaims. Draco simply raise an eyebrow. This is the argument Smith wants to convince him with?

“Potter clearly didn't even want to be in the Triwizard Tournament in the first place, and I highly doubt he is - *was* the type to kill someone over a witch. What would he have to gain by killing Diggory? Really? But I suppose that all doesn't matter now that the Ministry's gone and given him the Kiss - and here you stand mocking someone who was probably innocent. I may not have liked the prat, but no innocent deserves the Kiss,” Draco snarls. He wonders if he's perhaps been a bit too vocal in his defence of Potter, but blind idiocy has always irritated him. Smith and Macmillan eye him oddly before Smith sneers and drags Macmillan away. Draco rolls his eyes and closes the compartment door. When he turns around to sit back down, his friends are looking at him strangely.

"What?"

"You. Defending Potter. It's weird, that's all," Daphne comments. Draco shrugs. Nothing he's said isn't true, but he isn't going to go out of his way to tell them about the letters and budding *friendship* (ugh, really?) between him and Harry - *Potter, damnit!* Daphne eyes him

suspiciously, but Draco refuses to comment so she turns her conversation in another direction for the remainder of the train journey.

When they arrive at Hogwarts, it is just as dramatic as Draco remembers it, but it has lost some of the captivating sheen it held in previous years. He thinks of where he could have been at this very moment and resists the urge to sigh in irritation. Instead he endures the sorting and the feast and it is only later, after they have returned to the Slytherin common room and the first years have been taken care of, that he allows himself to give in to the irritation and anger he feels. He doesn't take it out on his friends but retreats to a corner of the common room and writes to Potter. His friends assume he is writing to his parents as many of them are also doing, but he is scribbling frantic lines of dissatisfaction, venomous rhetoric on the idiot students who occupy the castle, a fierce longing to be in New York learning things of greater import than the sedate Hogwarts curriculum.

He rests for a moment, throwing his quill down in frustration. He can almost imagine what Harry's reply will be like – some mild sympathy before telling Draco to man up and get on with it, to be a Slytherin and make the most of the hand he's been dealt. Of course, all this will naturally be followed by some ridiculous stories of what he and Loki are getting up to in New York as well as a little about that muggle school Harry was supposedly starting.

As he walks up to the Owlery, letter in hand, Draco resolves he has to do something about this. He's not quite sure what yet, but the opportunity his mother has denied him is too great to pass up. There has to be a way around it and he will find that way, sooner rather than later.

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Lucius has no real idea how they managed it, but they have Hufflepuff's cup in their possession, pilfered from the vault of Bellatrix Lestrange with no one – not even the goblins – being any the wiser. He stares at it where it sits on his desk with uneasy contempt before glancing over at Severus.

"You have the basilisk venom?" He asks nervously. "I would rather this done sooner than later, Severus."

Severus Snape produces a small vial from somewhere within his robes (the location of which puzzles Lucius exceedingly; his own robes never have so many hidden pockets as Severus' seem to) and places it on the polished wooden surface of the desk. Lucius reaches for it, giving Hufflepuff's cup and the Gaunt ring – the other horcrux they have managed to find thus far – a wide berth as he does so.

"You are certain this will work?" Lucius checks before removing the cork. Severus nods rather seriously.

"Albus confirmed that the venom had destroyed the soul piece within the diary quite thoroughly," he answers, folding his arms across his chest. "Now if you will get on with it, we can chase up that lead on the coast. I would rather not give Bellatrix time to catch up."

Lucius uncorks the vial and tips a few drops onto the Gaunt ring. He pauses and watches the drops settle on the dull metal surface and is about to admit defeat when the metal begins to sizzle and hiss violently. An ear-splitting scream rends the air around them, and a strange



wisp of something dark and malevolent rises from the ring. Lucius leans as far back in his chair as he can manage and Severus stumbles back a few steps as the wisp shifts through shapes and images, settling on the Dark Lord's face contorted in anger and pain before it puffs out of existence and peace is restored. Severus and Lucius look at one another, unsettled, and Lucius steels himself as he reaches out to pour the venom on the cup. As the droplets fall, he mourns the loss of such an artefact, but needs must.

As the soul piece from the cup vanishes forever, Lucius dares to touch what remains of the cup and the ring. Both items are twisted and marred horribly by both the basilisk venom and the horcrux and what had once been beautiful is now ugly beyond belief. Lucius' nose wrinkles in disgust and he banishes both items with a swift flick of his wand. Severus moves closer to the desk once more and corks the vial of venom, hiding it somewhere in his robes. It is a bit anti-climactic, really, and whilst basilisk venom is ridiculously expensive and notoriously difficult to find, Lucius had initially expected that some kind of complicated cleansing ritual would be necessary to destroy the horcruxes. Still, three down, four to go.

"Albus gave me the location of the cave when I met with him two days ago. Shall we?" Severus suggests, gesturing to the door of Lucius' office. Lucius rises from his chair elegantly and summons his cloak and cane to him as he joins Severus.

"And how is the esteemed Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? Still punishing children for the acts of their forefathers?" Lucius sneers.

"I saw little more than the headmaster's office, as you well know. If the children and other teachers are to believe that I am ill enough to be on a lengthy leave, my presence cannot be known," Severus points out as they leave the Manor. Lucius pauses to give a message to a house elf to pass to Narcissa, saying he will be away for possibly a couple of days on urgent business to do with the family holdings. He knows she has little interest in the day to day problems of the Malfoy holdings and she will not likely look into the truth of what he is actually doing.

They reach the apparition point fairly quickly after that and Lucius touches his hand to Severus' arm to allow for side-along. He dislikes the sensation of side-along, but the headmaster is unreasonably cagey about some of his information being known only by Severus (even with the oath, he does not trust Lucius, apparently; as if Lucius would risk his own son – the idea is ludicrous) and this is one such piece of information.

When they arrive at their destination, Lucius swears rather inelegantly as they are instantly battered by waves and wind from all sides.

"Surely there is a better location than a rock in the middle of the sea?" He fumes. Severus rolls his eyes and scans the cliff face for the cave Albus had mentioned. Lucius busily casts all kinds of weather-repellant charms while Severus searches and the effects of their environment dim significantly.

"There," Severus announces, pointing at the cliff face and grabbing Lucius' arm before the other wizard has a chance to look where the potions master is pointing. Another distasteful side-along and they are in a shallow, gloomy cave. Lucius does not see anything immediately, but knows that the Dark Lord's paranoia would have led to some impressive security measures. The two of them wordlessly cast all the detection spells they know before

resorting to examining and feeling along the walls of the cave. Lucius cannot help the flinch when he feels the tingle of malevolent magic meet his fingers, but he knows he has found what they are looking for. He calls Severus over to him and the other wizard examines the same spot.

“I feel nothing,” Severus says. Lucius tries again and once more he encounters that same magical marker.

“It is there, Severus, I swear,” Lucius rubs his fingers, trying to sooth away the horrid sensation. Severus places his hand on the wall again and shakes his head. Lucius looks at the wall, dumbfounded and Severus resumes his search on the other side of the cave. Lucius mulls it over in his mind as he continues to stare at the wall; he cannot have imagined it, surely? *But if Severus cannot feel it...*

Lucius almost laughs when it comes to him. It should have been obvious, he thinks, what with the Dark Lord’s obsession with keeping Wizarding bloodlines pure. He calls Severus over once more, but does not explain as he uses his wand to make a shallow cut on the palm of his hand and passes it across that same place on the wall, leaving a streak of his blood behind. As he pulls his hand away, the wall groans and grinds and a passageway appears in the rock. Lucius heals the cut on his hand and shoots a smug look at his friend. The potions master scowls but says nothing as he precedes Lucius into the passageway. They come out on the shores of a large underground lake with a small island in the middle. There is a magical boat resting next to them which they reluctantly use to travel across to the island. A pedestal with a large bowl filled with murky liquid awaits them and Lucius can just see a locket in the bottom.

“It’s too easy,” he says. “Surely we cannot just reach in and take it?”

Severus dips a cautious finger in the liquid and brings it close to his face. Lucius watches in trepidation as his friend first sniffs at the liquid and then takes a small tentative taste. Almost immediately, he spits on the ground and shoots a *scourgify* at his hand.

“Poison with hallucinogenic properties,” he reveals. “And no doubt in order to obtain the locket, we must drink the poison.”

Lucius swears inelegantly for the second time that day. “Is there any way to neutralize it? Surely you know of some ingredient we could bring here to add to it and make it as harmless as water?”

“I shall take a small sample and see what I can come up with,” Severus concedes, producing an empty vial from somewhere within his robes. He carefully fills it with some of the poison and corks it. Lucius hopes it will not take too long, or Bellatrix will be hot on their trail and he does not fancy having to duel her to the death.

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School continues to be remarkably and surprisingly easy for Harry. He had thought that being out of the muggle schooling system for four years and before that having received a *British* education, not American, would cause problems for him, but it all feels rather effortless in comparison to Hogwarts. The sciences especially come easy to him and Loki

smiles proudly when Harry talks about how simple those classes are for him. English is still deathly boring and the languages are still causing him a little bit of trouble, but Loki seems to think it is a by-product of the Allspeak allowing him to understand all languages on Midgard. Once or twice Loki comments that his talent in the sciences is a gift from Harry's father, but he never elaborates. Still, as oblique as it is, it is another clue Harry can use in the search for his father.

Peter is ridiculously awkward and friendly and helpful and Harry *loves* spending time with his new friend. Peter's shown him some of the best places in Queens and Midtown for food and has taken Harry to some see some of the sights on weekends - between helping him catch up, that is. Harry also loves watching Peter moon over Mary-Jane, a girl in their homeroom, though it does remind him a little of Ron and Hermione's not-relationship and whenever he thinks of them, he inevitably ends up feeling hurt or angry.

As autumn fades into winter, Harry's letters to Draco are filled with tales of his friendship with Peter and of the (mis)adventures they've been getting up to in and out of school. He shares some of what he's been learning (the majority of which confuse Draco greatly) and of his trials of mastering Loki's new way of magic. Draco's replies are filled with poorly veiled envy and Harry knows the other boy is fervently wishing he could be in New York, learning from Loki. Harry can also tell (though it is less obvious) that Draco *misses* Harry. His tales of Hogwarts are dark and jaded as he writes of severely fractured house relationships and the severe bullying the Slytherins – younger ones especially – are receiving at the hands of the Gryffindors.

Harry feels sick at some of Draco's tales, but is increasingly glad that he no longer attends Hogwarts. He cannot imagine what it would have been like for him, had he gone back following Diggory's death and the almost return of the Dark Lord (which the Ministry were denying, apparently). His gut tells him he would have been even more of an outcast than when his name came out of the Goblet of Fire. He misses Draco. He doesn't say it outright in his letters, but whilst Draco appears to be vehemently ignoring/denying it, Harry recognises it for what it is. He has become friends (of a sort) with Draco via their continuing correspondence and misses seeing him in person.

His friendship with Peter is a balm though. Initially, Harry and Loki agree to hide who Loki is, and the god becomes shifts to become Tom Larssen every time Peter comes to the apartment. Peter is often round for dinner (wanting to avoid Aunt May's attempts at cooking, apparently) and Harry's started noticing the strange looks (almost as if he is wary of something but isn't sure what) Peter directs at *Tom* whenever he arrives. Harry mentions it to Loki more than once, but Loki shrugs it off with little concern, instead focussing on researching the soul fragment that is latched onto Harry's own soul. His research is frenetic, and several times now he has pulled out the image of Harry's magical core to try to get a closer look at what he's dealing with. There has been no progress so far and whilst Loki seems to be more and more worried, for Harry, it is almost normal now that Voldemort is impinging on his life somehow.

He looks up and over at Loki from where he sits at the bar doing his homework. Loki looks tired. There are bags under his eyes and his movements have been slow and a little sluggish all day. He had come back from wherever he was early that morning, the slam of the door waking Harry, and since then he has looked dejected and emotionally exhausted as well as physically. Harry is tempted to steal the book from Loki and force him to go have a nap. He

sets down his pencil and is about to speak when there is a rhythmic knock on the door. Loki barely looks up from his book even when Harry hisses at him to shift when he goes to answer the door. Assuming Loki has heard him, Harry opens the door. Peter grins awkwardly at him and shoves his way into the apartment.

“So, I was thinking-“ Peter halts when his gaze falls on Loki who hasn’t shifted and is still sat there, nose buried in the ancient tome he has been reading for a week now.

“*Shit*,” Harry swears in Elderspeak. Loki makes an inquiring noise but doesn’t look up.

“Dude, that’s... that’s the guy who invaded Manhattan, like three years ago,” Peter says nervously, looking between Harry and Loki. Harry sighs heavily.

“*Móðir!*” He snaps. Loki finally looks up and spots Peter stood next to Harry. He lets out a frustrated sigh and sets the book to one side before standing up. Peter holds out a hand in front of him and steps back a little, his eyes darting around the apartment. Loki just stretches out his back and looks to Harry with a raised eyebrow.

“Perhaps you would care to explain things to your friend, Hávarðr?” Loki suggests, moving towards the fridge. He starts to pull out food for dinner and busies himself as Harry nods and motions for Peter to take a seat. Peter moves cautiously across the room and sits on the very edge of the sofa Harry is occupying.

“Where’s your dad, Harry?” Peter asks, never taking his eyes off Loki. Harry sighs and makes an impatient motion at the god. Loki obligingly shifts forms for a short while, continuing to chop onions as he does so before resuming his natural appearance. Peter just stares. His mouth hangs open for a short while before he manages to pull himself together. Harry thinks he still looks more than a little hysterical.

“Okay... um, you want to start explaining now? Because that really - I mean *really* did not help.”

“I’m Loki’s son. He visited earth several years ago, had a relationship and I was the result. I got into a little bit of trouble back in England, Loki sensed it and came to rescue me. Then we moved here,” Harry says simply. Peter looks at his friend in disbelief.

“You’re the son of a crazy alien psychopath?” He says. He shoots a quick look at Loki and winces, clearing hoping to live beyond the next minute. Loki merely chuckles.

“Hávarðr is being unfair on you, Peter. There is more to the story and if you care to stay for dinner and are willing to listen, I will explain it to you,” Loki offers. “Call your Aunt May.”

Peter eyes him warily but makes the phone call as Loki finishes preparing dinner and then the three of them sit down to one of the most intense dinners Harry’s ever had. When Loki finishes explaining the background to the Chitauri invasion and shows Peter a small number of the scars of his torture, Peter finally seems to relax. After dinner, Harry and Peter escape to Harry’s bedroom.

“So... you have an Evil Overlord for a mom,” Peter says, still bemused by it all. “I mean, he’s really your *mother*? I... I thought that wasn’t physically possible! Evil Overmom out there, pregnant - with a huge belly and all - having a baby!”

Harry glances over from where he’s laying on the bed.

“Its not for humans, I promise,” he replies. Peter gets an odd expression on his face and spins Harry’s desk chair around.

“But what about you?” He asks. “Um, with genetics and all, couldn’t you...?”

“What?!” Harry yelps. “No - no no no and no! That’s... that’s... oh *shit*. I’m going to have to ask now. Just to be sure. Oh, bloody hell. Thanks a lot, Parker!”

Peter snickers and continues to spin in the chair.

“And just so I’ve got this straight - you can do magic too? You went to a magic school in a super-secret magical community,” Peter asks.

“Yes. And you can’t tell anyone about it - its supposed to be a secret,” Harry insists.

“So why’d you tell me?”

“Because I needed to explain Loki and its a long a complicated story that would only make sense if I told you the whole thing,” Harry explains. “Its not that hard to believe, right? Not with aliens and Avengers and other stuff happening all the time now.”

“Crazy. Your life is crazy, dude,” Peter mutters, standing up and throwing himself down on the bed next to Harry. Harry just laughs.

“Don’t I know it,” he says. They fall into a companionable silence for a couple of minutes. Peter is the one to break it.

“You trust me, right? That’s why you told me everything?”

“Of course I do, Pete. You’re my friend,” Harry replies, confused. His friend looks uncertain and worried for a moment before his expression clears into something a bit more like resolve.

“I trust you too, Harry.”

And then Peter tells him his own secret and Harry’s life just gets that little bit crazier.

## **Chapter 10: On DNA and Aliens**

When Peter finds out that Harry is looking for his dad, he gets excited. Harry tries to calm him down, explaining how futile the search is, because all he’s got to go on is the first name *Anthony*, and the vague idea that Loki met him here in New York, but it doesn’t deter Peter. He brings his laptop around to Harry and Loki’s apartment and once they’re safely ensconced in Harry’s bedroom, types a mile a minute as he talks ridiculously fast and then

suddenly something changes on the screen and Peter sits back looking smug. Harry isn't sure what just happened but thinks he's probably supposed to be impressed. Instead, he looks between the screen and Peter blankly.

"What's SHIELD?" He asks. Peter rolls his eyes and starts clicking through links and typing once more until he apparently finds what he wants.

"It stands for Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division. Super-long name just to get a stupid acronym, I know, but they are a supposedly top-secret government agency who keep trying to recruit Spider-Man to be one of their pet superheroes. These are the guys who back the Avengers. Pretty sure they detained Evil Overmom out there for a short while too," Peter explains. Harry looks nervously between Peter and the screen.

"Should you be in their system, Peter?"

"No, but they'll never know. They never do. And anyway, I'm pretty sure Tony Stark hacks them all the time and he's still free, right?"

Harry shrugs.

"So how's this going to help me find my dad?"

"So now that I'm interning at Stark Industries, I'll have access to a lab where I can test your DNA and then run it against the extensive database SHIELD has – it's literally, like, everyone in the world – and we'll see whether there's a match," Peter says. "Won't take long."

Harry frowns a little. He isn't confined SHIELD could have everyone in the world on their database, but he *has* lived in the Wizarding World for the last few years, so who knows what happened during that time? And they *are* a secret organisation. Still, there are other things that are just a little more concerning.

"What if Stark Industries find out what you've been using their facilities for?"

"They won't. I've got, like, er... a preternatural sensing thing that tells me when danger is coming. It'll work for being found out too."

Harry leans back on his bed and thinks for a little while. This is illegal, but could give him exactly what he needs. He doesn't really want to be on the wrong side of a government organisation, but Loki is already on their naughty list; chances are they'd tar and feather Harry with that same brush too - governments tend to do that. And he wants to know who his dad is – whether he's still alive, whether he would want to know about Harry, whether eventually, he and Loki could reconcile... He stops that train of thought. He's reaching, dreaming and he knows it. Small steps first. He gives Peter a nod and his friend grins.

"How soon can we do this?"

Peter rummages in his bag and pulls out a medical-looking tube. "Now."

A few minutes later and Peter is screwing the cheek swab back into the plastic tube and shoving it into his bag. If Peter really can do what he says he can, then it might not be long until he can find out who his father is. Harry cannot help the smile that spreads across his face at the thought and finds himself ambushing Peter with a bear hug as the other boy is packing everything away into his rucksack. Peter seems a little surprised, but graciously takes Harry's garbled thanks and then heads home.

As the door shuts behind Peter, Loki gives Harry a curious look.

"He seems excited," Loki comments. Harry shrugs.

"He's always a little like that," Harry replies. It's not exactly a lie. Peter does have this odd, nervous-slash-excitability energy to him (which is possibly because of the whole powers-from-a-radioactive-spider-bite thing). It is however, not the whole truth and Harry knows that Loki *knows* it's not the whole truth. He just hopes Loki decides not to press for information. He can't exactly lie to someone known as the God of Lies. Fortunately, Loki just nods and finishes whatever he's doing on his Starkpad before setting it to one side.

"I must be honest with you, Hávarðr," he begins and Harry wonders if Loki is going to tell him the truth about where he's been going all those nights. "I am struggling to find information about the magic Voldemort used to bind his soul fragment to you."

Okay. So, not the information Harry thought it would be, but something worse. He slumps onto the sofa and rests his head in his hands. After a moment he looks up at Loki, lost and feeling lost and adrift.

"But you said you were the most powerful sorcerer in the Nine Realms - surely you know how to deal with it?" Harry said, tears of frustration burning at the corners of his eyes. Loki moves around the kitchen bar and across the room to where Harry is. He gently rests both hands on Harry's shoulders and draws him close, holding him in a light embrace.

"If it were a simple geas, I would be able to fix this almost instantaneously," Loki explains. "But this is a fragment of another's soul bound inexplicably to your own - a practise I have not seen before in any of the Nine Realms. I need more information, Hávarðr."

Harry grasps hold of the back of Loki's shirt tightly and buries his head in Loki's stomach, trying to hide his tears and how his body is shaking at the thought of Voldemort stuck to him forever. Loki kneels and forces Harry to look him in the eyes.

"I promise you - *swear* to you, Hávarðr, I will work this out. But I need more information on your Wizarding World's dark arts."

Harry manages to calm his breathing and as he does so, a thought comes to him.

"Draco. Draco will know where to get that information."

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When JARVIS interrupts his updates to the Iron Man suit, Tony is irritated at first, but when he sees *why*, he immediately calls down to the other lab in the Avengers floors of the Tower. “I’m at a really sensitive part of this experiment, Tony,” Bruce answers, voice calm. “This better not be about how *Star Trek Into Darkness* was an affront to mankind again.”

Tony’s lips curl up into a grin at the thought of debating that particular travesty of a film again, but this is a little more pressing than the ridiculousness of recasting Khan as a white actor (no offence to Bandersnatch Cumberbund, or whatever that British actor’s name is).

“Remember that project I told you about - the one about my weird-acquaintance-with-benefits?” Tony replies. There is the clatter of lab equipment over the line before Bruce answers.

“The results came in?” He asks.

“Yeah and as this is more your field than mine - even though I could read up on it overnight and be absolutely fine interpreting this data - I would kind of appreciate a hand right now. And I thought you might be interested.”

There is a pause on the other end of the line.

“Uh... give me half an hour, Tony, and I’ll be down there. I just need to finish this up first,” Bruce says.

“Sure thing, mean-n-green,” Tony ends the call and goes back to the data JARVIS is displaying. He flicks through it for a while, uncertain at what exactly he’s looking at and impatience thrumming underneath his skin. Half an hour is long but not long at the same time, but Tony’s been waiting to find out what exactly is up with Tom for a while now. Tom hadn’t visited since the night Tony had decided to look at the guy’s DNA, but JARVIS and Tony are getting nowhere with translating that odd language or dialect or whatever the hell it is and Tony *has* to solve this mystery.

“JARVIS, you wanna take another look for Tom Larssen in any databases you can find?” Tony doesn’t hold out much hope, but perhaps the guy will appear *somewhere*. He can’t be non-existent and outside the system. *Everyone* is in the system, right?

“Of course, sir,” JARVIS responds and another holoscreen pops up next to the one with the results from the DNA test showing the scan for Tom Larssen in progress. In the meantime, Tony tries to distract himself with the Iron Man suit he is working on, but ends up replaying the footage of Tom talking to him when he’s asleep. It doesn’t get any less creepy the more times he watches it. The way the man looks at him so tenderly and with such a heartbroken expression when literally all they’ve done in the time they’ve spent together is have sex. It doesn’t make any sense to Tony at all.

The hiss of the workshop door opening distracts him from the footage and he tells JARVIS to mute it as Bruce comes in, looking slightly harried, but entirely not-green. He’s shoving a slightly tired-looking sandwich into his mouth with one hand and carefully holding two cups of coffee in the other. He sets the coffee cups down on the table, finishes his mouthful and catches his breath.



“Hi,” he says, rather redundantly.

“Where’s *my* sandwich?” Tony asks. Bruce looks between him and the sandwich in question.

“You really want one of Steve’s corned beef sandwiches from yesterday? Besides, I brought you coffee. I thought you survived solely on coffee.”

Tony makes a face at the sandwich knowing what it is and grabs for the coffee.

“Ew, no. Has no one told him about the wide variety of sandwich fillings we have in the new millennium? Seriously, JARVIS, add that to Cap’s list. And coffee is the nectar of the gods and as essential to life as breathing,” Tony answers, holding the coffee under his nose and inhaling deeply. “Thank you.” He sighs. Bruce rolls his eyes and moves to look at the data JARVIS is displaying. The scan for Tom Larssen is still running on the rightmost screen and the one on the left shows the muted security footage playing on loop. The screen in the centre shows the results from the DNA test.

“This is it, right? Your guy’s DNA results?” Bruce clarifies, peering at the information.

“Yes, Dr Banner,” JARVIS answers. “These are the results from testing Tom Larssen’s DNA. As you can no doubt see, the results are quite peculiar.”

“What?” Tony snaps. “J, why didn’t you tell me?”

“I thought you might appreciate Dr Banner’s more thorough explanation, sir,” JARVIS says. Tony looks at Bruce, who is absorbed in swiping through the data, his frown growing increasingly.

“Bruce?” Tony prompts.

“This... this DNA Tony, its um... not human,” Bruce says awkwardly. He expands a diagram showing what looks like the double helix of human DNA but with some distinct differences.

“I think *these* are chromosomes - but I’m not sure; their structure is entirely different and there are fewer of them, but then there are these strange extensions...” Bruce points at the odd branches splitting off from the main structure. “And I have no idea what they are, if I’m honest. Its an absolute mystery.”

Tony stares at the image as Bruce continues to ramble on in scientific jargon which makes a vague kind of sense to Tony, but not really. After a few minutes of Bruce rhapsodising about the differences and what they could mean, Tony interrupts.

“So, he’s enhanced?” He asks. Bruce grinds to a halt and looks at the data thoughtfully.

“I... I don’t really think so. I mean, if he was enhanced, I’d expect to see at least the same base as human DNA - the same amount of chromosome pairs, etcetera. Take Steve’s DNA, for example - identical to a baseline human, but any trace of detrimental anomalies are gone. It would be the most perfect strand of human DNA. This... this is something different. Alien.”

Alien? *Shit.* Tony's been sleeping with an alien. Though somehow that doesn't sound as odd as it would have a few years ago.

"An alien who looks human?"

"Could be a shapeshifter. But I think you probably want to ask Thor. He's an alien and he looks human."

Tony looks between the muted footage of himself and Tom in bed and the DNA strands on the screen in front of him and frowns. Tom has a lot of questions to answer, but Tony won't be asking any just yet. He needs to know just a little bit more before he charges in straight away.

"So... any ideas on how to drag Thor away from his astrophysicist girlfriend?"

"Sir, you may wish to delay that," JARVIS interrupts. "My systems have discovered someone breaking into the SHIELD database. The individual in question appears to be searching for a DNA match. The DNA matches yours, sir."

\*

*Harry-Potter,*

*Merlin, Hogwarts is full of idiots. Even Slytherin seems more irritating than before. I've been back here for two weeks and already I am wishing to be away from here. ~~I wish I could come to New York.~~*

*The new DADA professor is as hopeless as all the others. ~~Except Lupin, I suppose.~~ For some inexplicable reason she believes we only need to learn the theory behind Defence and that there is no merit to actually learning and practising any of these spells. Apparently because the Dark Lord was vanquished all those years ago (ha! I know the truth!), we have no reason to learn how to practically defend ourselves. Because of course there won't be any other Dark Wizards out there. Dumbledore seems to be content to do nothing about the substandard education we are being given - apparently it is on Ministry orders that she is even here in the first place. Ugh.*

*At least I have Potions to keep me occupied. Uncle Sev made two of the Hufflepuffs cry the other day and Longbottom somehow succeeded in not only melting his cauldron, but the desk beneath it as well. ~~At least it made Weasley laugh. He looks so depressed its making me want to say something nice to him.~~*

*The Gryffindors do seem lost without you though. Longbottom seems to be taking charge, given that Weasley and Granger have become quite withdrawn without you. The youngest Weasley is the new Seeker for their Quidditch team, but I doubt she will pose much of a challenge for me. Quidditch is going to be incredibly dull this year without you. ~~Merlin, I miss you Harry.~~*

*Your muggle school sounds ~~intriguing~~ boring. They seem to be teaching all the things I was homeschooled in before Hogwarts. The languages were always my forte, and although Wizarding literature is not particularly wide-ranging, I did enjoy Shakespeare. I still have*

language lessons now, during the holiday periods. I can speak four languages almost fluently.

At least Parker sounds amusing. Is really always so high-strung? Surely that must be tiring. ~~Tell me you're not replacing me with him. First a Weasley, now a muggle....!~~ Perhaps one day, when I can actually travel to New York without my mother having a hysterical fit, I can meet him. ~~Then we'll see who is better.~~

Anyway - you've avoided telling me about your magic lessons in your last few letters. Come on, ~~Harry~~ Potter, that's the important stuff! All you've told me is that Loki makes you meditate, and that he does wandless magic like breathing! I need more information than that! I need to know if i am ever to learn any of this. I have started experimenting with wandless magic though. So far I can cast lumos and accio without a wand. My control was a bit out to start with, but I'm getting there now. Yesterday I managed to summon Goyle's second cupcake without him noticing. The look on his face, ~~Harry~~ Potter...

I have been meaning to ask, by the way - if Loki gave birth to you, does that mean you have that ability too? It would only be logical, if you are born of him, that you would have the same abilities after all. I can just imagine it now, Pregnant Potter, waddling through the corridors of Hogwarts... It would be amusing to say the least. ~~And I know a lot of gay pureblood wizards would give half their estate for that ability. I would. Merlin, to not have to marry a shrew like Pansy or Astoria just to secure the family line...~~

I'm not sure how much longer I'm going to last here. Did you know there has been an increase in the bullying of younger Slytherins? Perhaps now that you're not here to fight me, the other houses think they need to continue the tradition of fighting Slytherins. Naturally, none of them are bold enough to duel me. ~~I swear, if I see one more Ravenclaw or Gryffindor trip up or jinx a first year Slytherin there will be pain.~~

Anyway - details, ~~Harry~~ Potter! Details of your magic lessons with the most powerful sorcerer in the Nine Realms. I swear I will hunt you down if you don't tell me. At least then I ~~could see you~~ would be away from this idiot-filled castle of boredom.

~~Hatefully,~~

~~Draco~~ Malfoy

\*

Peter glances over his shoulder as he uploads the information on Harry's DNA. The other interns are all busy with their individual projects and the two researchers overseeing them are apparently occupied in the office area in the corner of this lab. With quick, efficient keystrokes, he breaks into the SHIELD database once more and searches for what he needs. Before long, Harry's DNA has been added and the system is flashing through file after file looking for a match. He wriggles in his seat, nervously gnawing on a fingernail and hoping he looks like he's busy on his robotics project. He tries to leave the search alone and go back to his work temporarily, but it keeps drawing his eye.

Harry had seemed nervous about looking for his father this way, but Loki was giving away nothing and Harry was desperate. Peter had over-exaggerated a little when he had said that

SHIELD had almost everyone in the world, but his friend had been so despondent he didn't know what to do. He hopes this will work, and that someone bold enough to have a relationship with Loki would also be someone on SHIELD's books, but he wasn't sure. SHIELD was big - international, even, but it didn't mean they would have this one Anthony out of millions who no doubt existed in the world.

A few hours later, Peter is deep into the wiring of his robotics project when a heavy hand lands on his shoulder. He jumps - almost more than he should around others - and the solder he's working with drips onto the metal work surface and forms a hard lump of uselessness. He scowls down at it and sets the soldering iron to one side, lamenting that his Spidey-sense hadn't picked up on someone approaching him. Perhaps they weren't threatening enough.

"Sorry kid," a voice apologises. "But I need to talk to you about something."

Peter sighs and is about to swivel around in his desk chair to face whoever interrupted him when he notices the SHIELD search has finished. A match is flashed up on the screen.

"What the hell?" He breathes, looking at the file that's come up.

"Yeah, that's what I need to talk to you about," the voice says. Swallowing hard, Peter turns and finds himself looking at Tony Stark.

"So, you're my kid?"

## **Chapter 11: On Grimmauld and Fathers**

Peter sits nervously on the luxurious sofa, trying not to fidget, eyes darting around the penthouse he'd been escorted into by an almost frantic Tony Stark. The man in question is hovering at the bar at the other end of the room, fiddling with the bottles and muttering to himself. When he'd appeared in the lab many floors below this one he hadn't allowed Peter to get a word in edgewise, rambling something about one night stands and paternity tests and needing to go somewhere else with a bit more privacy. Eventually he'd managed to pull it together enough to tell Peter's supervisor that he was taking Peter for a one-on-one tutorial session on robotics (which if it was true, would be totally and completely awesome and Peter hopes that he can maybe wrangle a session like that out of the man who is presently convinced he's Peter's father).

*Shit.*

Tony Stark is Harry's father. *Tony Stark* is Harry's father. Iron Man. And Loki is Harry's mother.

The pieces begin to fall into place in his mind and Peter immediately understands why Loki didn't want Harry to know who his father was. How could he explain to his son that he had a relationship with a man who since became his enemy and defeated him soundly several years ago when he was coerced to invade this planet? Peter wonders if he should tell Harry who his father is or if it would just cause more pain. Clearly there can never be a happy resolution to this, right? It's not like Tony Stark and Loki are just going to pick up where they left off, completely ignoring the whole Battle of New York fiasco, and fall into playing the Happy

Family of everyone's dreams. But Harry is his friend - a friend who trusted him in the first place with his secrets about who he is, what he can do and who his *mother* is (and that is still way too weird). Harry is his friend and Peter said he would help and now that he's found out the truth he needs to tell Harry.

He is about to pull his phone from his pocket and text Harry about meeting up when he is startled by a fancy bottle of water being placed on the coffee table in front of him. Tony Stark sinks into the chair opposite, watching Peter with wary, nervous eyes and his own bottle of water in his hands.

"Jesus," Tony breathes. "I mean, I suppose it was inevitable, given how much of a slut I used to be, but I never really expected..."

"Um, Mr Stark, I need to, um, explain-" Peter tries. Tony keeps talking.

"And you're my kid. I got that from the tests you were running - JARVIS told me, by the way, that you were doing them. Not that I'm not going to run them again just to be certain, but I saw the results. Pretty conclusive match," Tony says, failing to hide a grimace. Peter wonders briefly whether he should be offended on Harry's behalf, but remembers he's supposed to be telling Tony that it's not him, but *Harry* who is his son.

"Well, yeah, those results were, um, positive, but I gotta tell you-"

"Who's your mom, kid? And it's Peter, right? Interested in robotics and *clearly* good at coding - you got into *SHIELD*. That's impressive. That's what you ran your DNA against, right?"

"Um, yeah, I'm Peter and man, your work on robotics is sweet and I would really *love* to know more about how you integrated those learning protocols into that one that was in the magazine all those years ago, because I had a look at your papers and I really couldn't figure it out. Oh, but, um-"

"You don't have to tell me who your mom is if you don't want to, I mean, it sounds harsh but I probably won't remember her. I was pretty wasted for most of the 90s. Went off the rails for a bit right at the end of that decade."

"Um... sure. I, um, kind of figured? Right, but, Mr Stark, I'm trying to tell you-"

"That you just want money? Is that it? I can do that. I mean, it would be nice if I could get to know you, I think, but I'm probably not dad kind of material and I have this big laundry list of character defects that no one should really be exposed to so if it's money you want-"

"It's not me!," Peter bursts out. "It's not my DNA."

"What?" Tony stops abruptly and stares at Peter blankly.

"It's not my DNA. I'm not your son," Peter repeats. Stark's brow furrows in confusion.

"But why else would you be running that test?" He asks.

“Its for a friend,” Peter says lamely. “I, um, I offered to look for him.”

“For a friend,” Tony eyes him with an odd expression. “Right, a *friend*, sure. I get it. You want to find out what I’m really like before you decide whether a relationship with your old man is worth it.”

Peter groans in frustration and drops his head into his hands. He pulls at his hair for a moment before looking back up at Tony.

“Its really for a friend, Mr Stark, I swear. His name is Harry,” Peter explains, hoping Tony will believe him now.

“Sir, I believe Mr Parker is telling the truth. The data he uploaded and ran against the SHIELD database was labelled with the file name ‘Harry’,” A voice announces. Peter only just manages to stop himself from leaping up and sticking to the wall in fright and instead stares around to room.

“That’s JARVIS. He’s an artificial intelligence. He runs all my buildings,” Tony explains. Peter can feel the grin spread across his face.

“Seriously?! That is so sweet!” He almost shouts. He tries to calm himself. “I mean, that’s cool, man.”

Tony grins knowingly.

“You sure you’re not my kid?” He asks. Peter nods and fumbles with his phone for a moment before turning it around to show the picture he’s found. Its a ridiculous selfie Harry had sent when he was going out of his mind in boredom at the English assignment he was trying to do.

“That’s Harry. He’s my best friend,” Peter says. “He, uh, he wanted to find his dad and I thought I could help, you know, because I had access to lab equipment and I could get into SHIELD’s database so I, um, I did. I didn’t expect to find anyone - I thought it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack, but it... it worked.”

“JARVIS?”

“The test result is accurate, sir,” JARVIS confirms.

“*Jesus.*”

Peter watches as Tony leans back in his seat and rubs a hand over his tired face. He thinks about all the things the man’s just rambled at him and about how he is clearly both terrified and excited at the prospect of having a son. Maybe he needs to go and let it sink in.

“Um... Mr Stark? I should probably go now... I’ve, um, got homework?” he says awkwardly, standing up. He hopes Tony will believe him. He really needs to get out of here and tell Harry who his dad is. Tony stands too and walks Peter back to the sleek, futuristic elevator they’d travelled up here in.

“Can I get that picture?” He asks after a moment. He looks uncertain and less sure of himself than Peter’s ever seen and he hands his phone over to the man. Tony takes it and starts swiping.

“Kid, you need a new phone. Samsung? Really?” Tony comments as he finishes and hands it back.

“Saved to your private server, sir,” JARVIS announces moments later.

“You’re going to tell him, right? Harry,” Tony asks quietly.

“He’s my friend, Mr Stark. He wants to know,” Peter replies, getting onto the elevator. As the doors close, his last look at Tony Stark shows a man whose world has been blindsided by news he clearly never expected. The man looks simultaneously exhausted, terrified, excited and mournful and Peter wonders what he thinks of all this. Of whether he wants to meet Harry. Of how it will all go when they do meet.

When he returns to the lab where all his stuff is, only one of the other interns remains and their supervisors are back in the office again. Peter quickly saves all of his progress and securely locks away his project in his personal storage drawer before gathering up his rucksack and leaving. He sends a quick message to his aunt, letting her know he’s going to Harry’s then catches the subway.

He wonders how his friend will take it.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Malfoy,*

*As sorry as I am that you have to deal with Hogwarts, I’m not sorry I’m not there. It sounds like a nightmare and the DADA professor sounds useless. What kind of witch or wizard seriously thinks that practical DADA is not necessary? Jesus. I would have at least thought that Dumbledore would do something about it though.*

*I’m glad Neville is doing well - and it wouldn’t be Potions if he didn’t have a disaster that sent Snape into a conniption - I bet he knew even though he wasn’t there! (I’m still not over that you call Snape ‘Uncle Sev’; I don’t care if he’s your godfather, its bloody hilarious!) Slughorn sounds a bit unhelpful. Wonder how long it’ll be before Snape gets better and is back teaching?*

~~*Please stop writing about Ron and Hermione. I can’t keep hearing about them and knowing that they didn’t stand up for me. I need to move on. I miss them, Draco, but I can’t keep thinking about them.*~~

*I can’t quite believe it, but I’m actually top of the class in several of the subjects at school. For some reason, I just get maths and science. ~~Móðir~~ Loki says its because my dad is good at maths and science. I wish Loki would just tell me who my dad is. If he did that and just explained, then maybe I would understand why Loki doesn’t want me to meet him. I just don’t get what could be so bad about it.*

Anyway. Peter seems to think he can find my dad - though I don't think what he's planning on doing is entirely legal. His internship gives him access to some lab equipment where he can test my DNA and then he did some fancy computer thing where he got into this database that has information on everyone in the world (apparently). Not that you're going to understand a word of that. Still, maybe he'll find my dad, but I doubt it.

~~I wish you could come to New York too. Is that weird? Wanting to see you when we've only really been awful to each other in person? Its only since I left that we've even got on. Maybe we're better off writing to each other.~~

You and Peter would get on, I think. Both of you have asked if I can have babies like ~~Móðir~~ Loki. Ugh. Not something I want to think about. Not something I really want to ask Loki either, but I suppose I should, right? Hopefully the answer will be no. ~~Please let the answer be no.~~

My magic lessons are going well, I think. Loki's finally moved me from meditation into actually using my magic. This week I've learned how to create fire (without burning myself) and how to summon a book from another room. Basics, really. I can't wait until I can make copies of myself or shape shift like Loki can.

You're a bloody show off, Malfoy. Going on about how much you learned before Hogwarts. And since when do wizards know about Shakespeare? He's a muggle! And four languages? Is that even necessary? Let me guess, English, Latin, French and some other random language that I have no clue about. But teaching yourself to do two spells wandlessly is pretty impressive, I'll give you that. And Goyle's face when he realised his second cupcake was gone must have been hilarious. You should have taken a photo.

~~By the way, do you have any books on dark arts?~~

~~Loki needs to know more about the da-~~

~~Any chance you can recommend some books about magic involving soul fragments?~~

I wasn't going to tell you this, but what I need to ask would be really weird without explaining so, here goes. Loki discovered something not so great when we were looking at my magical core. Apparently I have a fragment of Voldemort's soul attached to my own. Loki thought it was something else - a geas - to start with and was going to remove it, but he doesn't know enough about the Wizarding World's kind of magic to risk anything. ~~Please don't hate me Your dad is pretty into dark arts, right? I mean, I saw him in Borgin and Burke's that one time~~ Your fancy manor has a massive library, right? Any chance you've got any dark arts books on soul fragments we could borrow? ~~Not that I'm implying anything, I swear.~~

This is so awkward. Ugh. ~~Móðir~~ Loki is so worried about it and I can't say I want any part of Voldemort stuck to me at all. If you can help at all, I would really appreciate it, Malfoy. I wouldn't ask if it wasn't serious.

Anyway. Um. Hope Hogwarts improves? ~~Or that you can come to New York.~~

Potter



*P.S. Holy shit, Draco, Peter found my dad.*

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It takes Severus almost a week and a half of non-stop research and experimenting, but he comes up with something he believes will neutralize the poison and he and Lucius make the return journey to the cave. Fortunately, there has been no sign of Bellatrix on their tail just yet, but they had seen the news of the massacre at Gringotts. Clearly she had been to her vault and noticed the missing cup. They do not know where she is hiding, or who is sheltering her. She is not their focus, after all, but being aware of her movements is important. They have heard nothing of her recently and it is worrying.

As they stand at the pedestal on the island in the underground lake, Lucius resists the urge to shift nervously from foot to foot as Severus pours the neutralizing agent into the poison. As they watch with bated breath, the murkiness of the liquid changes to a crystalline blue and Severus dips his finger into it. He sniffs at his finger and darts out his tongue to taste it, before turning to Lucius with a rather smug smirk.

“I do believe it has worked. Shall we drink?” Severus suggests, conjuring two goblets and passing one to his friend. Lucius nods, fills the goblet and eyes it warily for a moment before drinking. It tastes tangy and sweet and Lucius wonders what ingredients Severus used to give it that flavour. It doesn’t take too long for them to finish the liquid together and they eye the locket cautiously. It is not likely to be spelled with curses at this point, considering it was kept in poison, but to be safe, they cast all manner of detection charms before picking it up. As they reach the boat on the shore of the island, Lucius halts at the sight of the waters of the lake beginning to ripple and move. He glances at Severus who is busy pushing the boat back onto the waters. Apparently his friend has noticed nothing. Several bodies lunge from beneath the surface and Lucius grasps his wand tightly.

“Severus, please tell me I am not hallucinating the inferi coming for us?” He asks as calmly as he can manage. Severus looks up and by the way he draws his wand Lucius knows he is not seeing things. As the creatures splash clumsily but quickly through the water towards them, they begin casting curses and protective spells around themselves and the boat but the sheer number of inferi is overwhelming and Lucius regrets not taking the time to search the cavern properly when they first discovered it. As the boat rocks violently and is in danger of being smashed to pieces, Lucius impatiently casts *fiendfyre*, his aim precise and control impeccable and the inferi shriek in pain as they burn. It does not take long, but the exertion required to maintain his control of the spell and then cancel it drains Lucius enough that he needs Severus’s support as they finally exit the cave.

Back in his office at the Manor, he downs a Pepper-Up potion before they look to the locket. It is dull and not especially pretty and Lucius thinks it looks rather unlikely to be a horcrux. It does not feel as a horcrux should either – he cannot feel the bleed of the dark magic as he did with the cup and the ring. He hands it to Severus who examines it closely, opening it. There is a note inside and the words of it make Lucius want to cry. All that effort for a *fake*!

“*Lucius!*” Severus snaps, drawing his friend’s attention. “It is not a dead end – R. A. B. You know who that is just as well as I do.”

“Yes, Severus, but he is dead. The Dark Lord killed Regulus Black when he discovered the man’s betrayal. We all know this; we all saw it!” Lucius points out. Severus pinches the bridge of his nose in frustration.

“I cannot believe I am about to suggest this,” he mutters as he leans over and takes a spare piece of parchment and a self-inking quill from Lucius’ desk. With quick, angry strokes he writes before passing it to the blonde.

“Read that and memorise it,” he instructs.

“Number 12 Grimmauld Place,” Lucius reads confusedly. “That’s the old Black townhouse. It’s under *fidelius*?”

“Indeed,” Severus snatches the piece of paper back and sets it alight with a quick flick of his wand. “And that is where we are going now.”

He practically shoves Lucius through the floo, calling out their destination as he does so. Lucius almost lands in a heap on what looks to be a rather dirty stone floor but manages to right himself at the last minute. Severus steps out elegantly beside him into what appears to be a rather dilapidated drawing room of some sort. The room itself is empty of occupants, but Lucius can hear noise coming from somewhere in the house. He follows Severus, wincing when the noise becomes clearer and he recognizes it as the *dulcet*, shrieking tones of Narcissa’s beloved Aunt Walburga, interspersed with another angry voice, shouting insults back. As they wind their way through the hallways, they pass a grumbling, wizened house elf who doesn’t even pause to give them the time of day. Had his own house elves behaved in such a manner, he would have punished them quite severely. He is quite surprised when Severus addresses the house elf rather sharply.

“Kreacher, you will bring tea to the first floor drawing room immediately,” Severus commands. The house elf gives him a rather filthy look.

“Filthy half bloods sullying Mistress’ home,” he mutters. “Kreacher should poison the tea. Mistress would like that.”

“How *dare* you!” Lucius snaps, losing his patience entirely. “How *dare* you speak to your betters in such a way. You will bring tea immediately and you will cease speaking or you will be punished.”

Kreacher looks wide eyed at Lucius for a moment before something like delight crosses his face and he bows low to the floor.

“Lord Malfoy is being welcome to Mistress’ house,” he says almost excitedly. “Kreacher will be fetching tea at once and then Lord Malfoy may be punishing Kreacher however he is wanting!”

Kreacher snaps his fingers and pops away, leaving Lucius and Severus alone in the hallway. Lucius can still hear the shouting. Severus rolls his eyes and starts up the staircase they are stood by, motioning for Lucius to follow. The second voice stops shouting as they near the top of the stairs, but Walburga continues to rant, the sound beginning to grate on Lucius’ ears. As they reach the landing, he spies her portrait, glaring sourly from its dull-

framed confines. The sour-faced woman has her arms folded primly across her chest as she shouts and hurls invectives. Lucius wonders if it is worth trying to pacify her and ignores Severus' attempt to stop him.

"Darling Lady Walburga, you look magnificent," Lucius begins, pouring on the charm. Walburga stops mid-sentence and looks at him, eyes a little wild. After a moment, she seems to recognize him and smiles benevolently at him.

"Lord Malfoy! What a pleasure it is to have you in my home once more," she proclaims. "And how is my dear niece Narcissa? Is she here with you? Oh how I long to see her and dearest Bellatrix!"

Severus watches in disgust as Lucius continues to charm the portrait, all pretty words and devilish smiles. There is a confused shout from elsewhere in the house and Severus hears floorboards creaking closer and closer to where tow where they are. He shifts uneasily, slipping his wand into his hand in premonition. A red spell flies over his head as he ducks sharply and it slams into the wall behind him. He barely registers Lucius' conversation with the portrait ceasing as he blocks several more spells that shoot in their direction before the caster reveals himself. He looks healthier than when Severus last saw him, the gauntness of his stay in Azkaban vanishing with the aid of proper food, no doubt. He is still pale, but cleaner and tidier and wearing clothing more reminiscent of his younger days – good quality without being ostentatious and more than the rags of his Azkaban-issued uniform. Sirius Black glares at them both, wand pointing in their direction.

"Sneaking Death Eaters into Order headquarters, Snivellus?" He spits. "I always knew you were still loyal to the Dark Lord."

Severus refrains from cursing Black and simply settles for glaring as he speaks.

"Perhaps if you paid attention to Dumbledore's missives you would know that we are on a mission to ensure the Dark Lord never returns," he snaps. "And regrettably, we need your help."

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Harry texts Loki as he's leaving school, saying he's going to spend some time with Peter. Its not quite a lie, but its close and he hopes that there's enough truth in it that Loki won't be able to tell. Its been two days since Peter rushed around, dragged him out for 'skateboarding' and told him the truth. Peter's test found Harry's dad and its Tony Stark. Iron Man. One of the Avengers and most likely to be holding at least a grudge, if not outright hating his mother. Its a disaster of epic proportions and Harry dreads how its all going to turn out in the end, but he *has* to meet his father. He has to know his dad.

And according to Peter, his dad wants to meet him too. Apparently Peter had gotten a message from Tony Stark late the previous evening asking to meet Harry as soon as possible. So, here they were, on their way to Stark Tower, for Harry to meet his dad. Nerves are swirling around in his stomach and once or twice Harry thinks that plus the motion of the subway is going to make him throw up, but he tries to focus himself and breathe, slipping just a little into that meditative state Loki taught him to find.

He'd looked Tony up on the internet after Peter had told him. He'd seen all the headlines from his wild youth up until his present day Avenging and philanthropy and wondered at how different the man's life would have been if Loki had stayed with Harry and they had been a family. He'd wondered a little if that was still possible - them being a family - but reality (and footage from 2012) assures him that it's highly unlikely. There is a reason Loki didn't want Harry to know who his father is, and Harry can understand now. He didn't want Harry to get his hopes up for something that would likely be impossible. A small part of Harry wonders about softening the blow for his dad - because surely, with the man's genius, it won't take him long to work out something is weird about Harry and from there, find out the whole truth. If he can do that, and then explain that Loki's mind wasn't his own during the invasion then maybe things could at least be amicable? Harry knows Loki hasn't told him everything though. He knows that there are probably things between Loki and Tony that are unresolved - the least of which being Loki pretending to be someone else (a human) throughout their relationship.

A sharp elbow nudges him in the side and jolts him from his thoughts. Peter grabs him by the arm as the train pulls into their stop and they exit, pushing through the heaving crowds as they make their way out onto the street. Peter almost drags Harry over to where Stark Tower stands, tall and gleaming, the giant A of the Avengers glowing at the very top. Harry swallows against the nervousness that swells up and follows Peter in through the revolving doors.

"Um... this is a good idea, right?" Harry hisses. Peter halts and looks at him incredulously.

"Seriously, man? I thought this was what you wanted!"

"It is, it's just... *Móðir*," he replies, voice low. Peter looks at him sympathetically and with understanding.

"Look, I'm not saying it won't be a crazy ass clusterfuck of epic proportions when everything comes out, but your *dad* wants to meet you. And you want to meet him, right?"

"Yeah," Harry replies, feeling a little warmer inside. He's going to meet his *dad*. Peter grins and grabs him by the arm again.

"Come on, we need to speak to Mrs Arbogast first," he says, dragging Harry over to the shining front desk. The *Stark Industries* and *Avengers Initiative* logos glow in bright lettering on the front of the desk. Behind it sits a severe looking woman with half-moon glasses perched on the end of her nose. She eyes them sternly. Harry is reminded of Professor McGonagall and suddenly finds himself missing his old head of house.

"Mr Parker," Mrs Arbogast says in greeting. "You're not due in the labs today."

"Hi Mrs A. Mr Stark wanted to see me and my friend. Is it okay if we head up?" Peter asks cheerily. Mrs Arbogast just looks at him before checking something on her computer screen and pressing a few buttons. A moment later she looks back at them.

"Apparently you're right," she sniffs. "You know the drill - security first. Then you can take the elevator on the far right."

Peter thanks her and all but shoves Harry over to the x-ray machine and metal detectors near the elevators. Harry watches his friend and copies what Peter does, shoving his bag into the tray provided by the security staff and taking off his jacket to throw it into another one. The security staff wave them through the metal detectors one by one and once they're clear they collect their belongings and are shown to the elevator on the far right. When the doors close, it begins to move of its own accord, without them having to push any buttons.

"Sir has asked me to take you to the penthouse level," a cool British voice announces. Harry jumps and looks around.

"What the bloody hell was that?" He demands. Peter laughs.

"I did that too, when I first met JARVIS," he says through his laughter.

"Who's JARVIS?" Harry asks, confused and slightly irritated at his friend.

"I am," the voice interrupts. "I am Mr Stark's artificial intelligence. I run all of his buildings, assist him in the workshop and in the Iron Man suit. He would be quite bereft without me."

Harry grins as the elevator slows to a halt and the doors slide open noiselessly.

"Mr Stark asks you to make yourselves comfortable. He will join you momentarily," JARVIS instructs. Harry follows Peter in, eyes wide as he takes in the luxury of the rooms around him. The wide expanse of floor to ceiling windows showcase a view of Manhattan unlike any other and Harry immediately moves to go and look out across the city. When he manages to tear his gaze away, he sees Peter making himself comfortable on the long leather couch that curves around the edge of a recessed area. A couple of bottles of water sit on the coffee table by the couch and Peter is already cracking one open.

"Peter," Harry hisses.

"What? Mr Stark gave me one last time I was here," he replies calmly.

"But they might not be for us," Harry snaps. Peter shrugs and drinks down half of the bottle before putting the cap back on.

"Come on, Harry, chill out. Its going to be fine. Mr Stark is awesome."

"You can come back again, Nosey Parker," a voice calls out teasingly. Harry jerks around to the sight of Tony Stark - *his dad* - exiting the elevator. His mouth goes dry and his nerves ratchet up a few notches. Tony Stark stops a few feet away and looks at him, eyes wide and mouth slightly open. Harry looks back and sees everything in Tony that Loki had said Harry had. He sees the messy hair, the fading grin on Tony's lips, the height (or lack of it, even if Tony was currently a few inches taller than Harry) and body shape. Harry shifts awkwardly after a few moments and drops his gaze, unsure what to say.

"Um... hi Mr Stark," Harry eventually says quietly. "Peter... Peter said you wanted to see me."

“I did,” Tony replies, voice calmer than Harry feels. Harry glances up at the man and thinks he can see nerves in the lines of his face, even if everything else about him oozes calm.

“Peter’s test said you’re my dad,” Harry explains unnecessarily. He *knows* Tony already knows all of this - Peter had told him the frankly hilarious story of how Tony mistook Peter as his son initially before Peter had managed to tell him the truth. He isn’t quite sure what else to say.

“JARVIS checked. So did my friend,” Tony replies with a smile. “You’re definitely my kid.”

“Sorry if you, um, didn’t want to know if you had a kid or not. I wanted to find you and Peter said he could help with that and I didn’t really think whether or not you would want... I mean, you’re a billionaire. Why would you want a... a kid? Um, I’m not here for money if that’s what you think and I can go if you don’t want-”

“*Jesus*, kid, slow down,” Tony interrupts, moving closer. He reaches out with a tentative hand and rests it on Harry’s shoulder. “Just slow down.”

Harry stops and takes a deep breath and tries to ignore the tears burning in his eyes. For so long he’s been without parents. He’d lived with the Dursleys abusing him, he’d endured taunts about being an orphan then and at Hogwarts. He’d learned his parents hadn’t died in a car accident, but had been murdered and he’d heard people talk about their memories of them without ever thinking what it would feel like for Harry to hear that and not know what it was like to know them himself. To then find out that they were his adoptive parents - and they loved him enough to give their lives for him - and to find out that both his parents were still *alive*... Harry focuses on the feel of his dad’s hand on his shoulder and *breathes*.

“I may not have expected this - which really, I should have, given how many women I - um, you don’t need to hear about that. Anyway, I may not have expected to suddenly find out I have a kid, but it doesn’t mean I don’t want you,” Tony says quietly. “I’m probably going to be an *awful* father - my old man was, so I don’t exactly have a good example to follow - but if you want me, I’m willing to try.”

Harry looks up at Tony and smiles.

“Um, that would be good, thanks,” he says awkwardly. Tony offers him a little grin and directs him towards the couch Peter is sat on, studiously looking at his phone and not paying any attention to them whatsoever.

“So... what’s your name, kid?” Tony asks, picking up one of the bottles of water and settling into an armchair.

“Hávarðr Anthony Larssen,” Harry replies. “But most people call me Harry. Hávarðr is a bit of a mouthful.”

He looks over at Tony - his *dad* - but the man is frozen in his seat.

“Did you say ‘Larssen’?”

And suddenly Harry knows *exactly* what Loki has been doing when he's been vanishing from the apartment late at night. *Fuck*.

## **Chapter 12: On Draco and the Avengers**

It doesn't take much to fool Professor Slughorn into believing he needs to go home for a family emergency. Draco uses his rather impressive acting skills to convince the old man that he's incredibly distraught and fearful (and given that Draco is usually cool and composed, it isn't hard) to the extent that he's flooing home with his belongings from Professor Slughorn's rooms within a day of receiving Harry's latest letter. Draco assumes that Professor Slughorn will eventually remember to tell McGonagall and Dumbledore and then they will check with his parents, but by then, Draco will be in New York. If it had been Uncle Sev, this would never have worked. As much as he hates that his godfather is ill and unable to teach this year, it is a blessing in disguise that has very much worked to Draco's advantage.

He's timed his departure from Hogwarts well enough that he arrives at the Manor after his parents have retired for the night. The Manor is dark and silent and Draco grins to himself as he realises he might actually have the chance to pull this off. He creeps through the Manor in the direction of the Grand Library his great grandfather had put together and is soon rifling through the tome that lists the library's contents, searching for anything to do with soul magic. It is frustratingly slow work, but eventually he finds a relatively small section on soul bonds and soul magic and something he's never come across before - horcruxes. He flicks through the books before deciding to just take all five of them with him. It's not like his father will notice them missing - what use can he have for books on soul magic? And it *is* only five out of the many hundreds of books in the Malfoy collection. He shrinks the books and slips them into his pocket as he exits the library, keeping a keen eye out for any house elves that might be cleaning ready for the morning. He hears a couple of them humming off-key as they clean in his mother's drawing room and the solarium, but he is quiet enough that they don't hear him.

Back in the floo room, he places the books into his trunk and heads off to his father's office in search of his magical passport. He has enough gold to get him floo passage to the New York City Floo Terminal, but they will not let him through without some kind of identification. He knows his father keeps their passports locked away in a drawer in his office, he just needs to somehow work out which one without disturbing too many of his father's papers. He's worked around his father's wards before, so that is little trouble, but the myriad of drawers that are in his father's office pose a little more of a challenge. Very carefully, he unlocks and searches them, wishing he could just cast an *accio* on his damned passport. He could, if he wanted to create an enormous mess that would lead to his father realising sooner rather than later just what he is up to, but he needs to be well hidden in New York before they even realise that he's left.

Eventually, he finds his passport and smirks triumphantly before closing and locking all the drawers he'd opened searching for it. Passport in hand, he carefully prints a note addressed to his father, explaining what he's doing and where he's going and why, before burying it in the middle of a pile of papers his father won't touch for at least another two weeks. Satisfied, he exits his father's office and steals his way back to the floo room. He shrinks his trunk, puts it in his pocket and grabs a handful of floo powder. He's at the London International Floo Terminal in mere moments, grinning at the thought of what lies ahead.

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"Did you say 'Larssen'?" Tony repeats urgently.

Harry has never once thought that he would hate his parents, but as Tony stares at him expectantly, waiting for an answer with concern in his eyes, Harry has to try very hard to resist the urge to hate Loki. He realises he's perhaps left it a little too long to answer and tries to respond calmly and without giving anything away.

"Yes," he says. His tone is even and he congratulates himself on a job well done, before he realises Tony's concern has only grown.

"You live with your mom, right?" Tony asks hurriedly.

"Um..." Harry starts, unsure how to answer. He lives with his mother, yes, but his mother is also a man who has apparently been sleeping with his dad in a different appearance to when they last were together and this is all kinds of complicated that Harry doesn't even know how to explain and doesn't even want to.

"His mom's dead," Peter interjects awkwardly. Harry shoots him a grateful look, even as Tony frowns even more.

"I live with my, um, uncle," he tries, wincing inwardly as the words leave his mouth.

"Tom? Tom Larssen?" Tony presses.

"Yeah, he's pretty cool - do you know him?" Peter says, obviously trying to help, but really not understanding what's going on. Harry could strangle him right now.

"*Shit*," Tony hisses. "JARVIS, get Steve and the others up here. We've got a problem."

"What? What problem?" Harry demands even as Peter starts bouncing up and down excitedly on the sofa next to him.

"The Avengers? Holy shit, I get to meet the Avengers! This day is all kinds of awesome!" Peter exclaims, clutching at Harry's arm. "Your dad is so cool, Harry. Like, beyond cool."

Harry ignores Peter, who continues babbling about the Avengers, and instead watches his father, who is busying himself with blue light that has appeared in the air around him. He watches in fascination and no small amount of trepidation, as Tony swipes and flicks the light around, eyes scanning the information that appears.

"JARVIS, I need all that information we pulled together on Larssen now - and anything else you think might be connected or relevant," Tony orders. More information springs up around him and Harry shrinks back into the sofa, unsure what to do and what's going to happen.

He never meant for this to happen. He just want to meet his father and now things are going wrong. He wants to get out of there, to tell Loki that he's found his father but also done something incredibly stupid, because he's placed Loki - *his Móðir* - in danger and he never meant to do this, never meant for it to turn out this way, he just wanted to know his father,



now that he knows both of his parents are alive but its all going wrong and they're going to find and hurt his *Móðir* because of the invasion and what he did even though he never meant to do it, not when Tony and Harry live on earth but he was tortured and now Harry's going to get him hurt again and this is all too complicated and too much and things were so much simpler when he was at Hogwarts even though they all hated him and why did he even think this would be a good idea he should have just let the Dementors or even Voldemort have done with him and he can't breathe he can't breathe he can't *breathe*-

"C'mon, kid, with me," a voice orders, calm and collected and Harry feels large hands on his arms as he gasps for breath and it stutters in his chest. As his breath catches, he gasps and struggles and that voice speaks again.

"In with me, come on," it says, and Harry can feel someone slipping behind him on the sofa and feels the rise and fall of their chest as they breathe deeply and evenly. "Match your breaths with mine."

Harry's breath stutters again, but he focuses on the rise and fall and eventually manages to find some kind of even keel and the breathlessness recedes. He shivers and looks around, seeing Peter staring at him worriedly next to him on the sofa. A man with glasses and riotously curly hair sits on the coffee table in front of him. He gently reaches out and takes Harry's wrist in his hand, pressing his fingers to his pulse point and looking at his watch. Over the man's shoulder, Harry can see his father, surrounded by the blue lights, but frozen in place and staring at Harry, expression fearful. A woman with short red hair stands next to him, her hand on his arm, ready to hold him back.

"Okay, now that we've got you back here, can you tell me your name?" The man in front of him says.

"H-Harry," he manages.

"I'm Dr Banner. Do you know where you are?" Dr Banner asks.

"Stark Tower," he says with a little more confidence. "What happened?"

"I think you had a panic attack, Harry. You may feel shaky and dizzy for a little while, but that's normal. You're going to be okay," Dr Banner soothes. Harry nods and watches as Dr Banner stands and heads over to where Tony is. Harry glances back at whoever is holding him, and thinks he recognises him as Captain America, but isn't certain. He glances around the room again and thinks he recognises the others as Avengers as well, including another man who has appeared and is perching on top of the bar.

"Harry," Peter whispers. "Are you okay?"

Harry wants to laugh hysterically, because he's just had a panic attack and the Avengers are going to find and hurt his *Móðir*, so things are really not okay, but instead of telling Peter that, he just shakes his head and tries to curl in on himself some more. The hands on his arms rubs gently, soothingly and Harry focuses on his breathing once more before daring to look over at his father who is approaching him carefully. Tony slowly lowers himself to sit on the coffee table where Dr Banner had been just a short while ago.

“Hey kid,” he says awkwardly. “I... I didn’t mean to upset you, but I need you to answer some questions honestly, because I’m worried you’re in danger, okay? Something very strange is going on and I want to get to the bottom of it and make sure you’re safe.”

“I am safe. I’m fine,” Harry protests.

Tony looks away and holds out a Starkpad for Harry to look at. A blurry picture of Loki in his Tom disguise is on the screen.

“Is that your uncle?” Tony asks gently. “You live with him, right?”

Harry considers not replying, or lying, but realises it is most likely futile.

“That’s Tom,” he confirms. Tony nods slowly and takes the Starkpad back. He awkwardly reaches out and pats Harry on the knee before going back to join Dr Banner, who’s studying the blue hovering information intently, his brow furrowed. He and Tony talk in low murmurs for a short while before Dr Banner suddenly stops and enlarges something with his hands. He stares at it for a few moments before enlarging something next to it and looking between the two.

“They match,” he says, loud enough for Harry to hear.

“What?” Tony asks incredulously.

“They match - like yours and Harry’s. There are parental markers in the DNA along with the odd anomalies we saw in Larssen’s - which I have no idea how I missed before. Looking at this, I’d say Larssen isn’t his uncle - he’s his father,” Dr Banner explains.

“But *I’m* his father - didn’t we prove that already?”

Dr Banner shrugs.

“If Larssen is alien, like we thought, then maybe Harry has two fathers,” he guesses. “You really should ask Thor, Tony.”

“Bruce, if you can drag him away from his *interest* in astrophysics, then I will,” Tony replies. “Two dads? Is that even possible?”

“Man, you procreated with an alien - I think that’s the more worrying thing,” the man perched on the bar cat-calls. “How didn’t you notice?”

“I think I would remember if I did it with an alien,” Tony snaps back.

“Unless they looked human, like Thor,” the woman - the Black Widow, Harry thinks - points out.

“And this is why you need to talk to Thor,” Dr Banner reiterates exasperatedly. Tony sighs heavily and rolls his eyes.

“Look, if Larssen is Harry’s other father then why don’t I remember meeting him way back then? Huh?” Tony points out.

“Well, you did have a period in the late 90s where you screwed anything on two legs,” the man on the bar says.

“Clint!” Captain America, still behind Harry, snaps. “There's children here!”

Peter makes some kind of protest at that, but no one pays any attention.

“Sorry, Cap, but its true. Shellhead’s relationship tanked and he spent the rest of the nineties and early 2000s drunk out of his mind and doing the horizontal tango with anyone that looked his way,” Clint explains. Tony rolls his eyes.

“Women. They were all women, if anyone had bothered to notice. I’d had a high profile, long term relationship with a man,” Tony says, his breath hitching with emotion briefly before he calms himself. “It ended abruptly, so I didn’t look at another man for a long time.”

“JARVIS, can I get a picture of Larssen and Tony’s boyfriend from the nineties on the TV please,” the Black Widow asks. The two pictures appear side by side on the giant tv screen and Harry inhales sharply when he sees just how similar the two look. Loki really has been playing with fire. He glances at Peter, who looks at him with wide, disbelieving eyes and shakes his head before Peter can say anything. Not that he thinks it’ll be long before they put two and two together anyway. The Avengers all fall silent as they stare at the TV screen, taking in the similarities between the two. Its there in the shape of the nose and the high cheekbones and although the eyes are different colours, the intensity of the gaze is similar. Both also are not that different from Loki’s real face either, Harry realises. He buries his face in knees and wonders just how Loki thought he could get away with this - and for how long he was planning on doing it.

“When’s your birthday, Harry?” Cap asks quietly.

“31st July,” he replies, knowing there really is no point in lying anymore. The truth is there in the DNA samples and the images displayed on the TV screen.

“What year?”

“1999.”

Across the room, Tony inhales sharply.

“So... unless you had an affair...” the Black Widow says. Harry thinks she’s trying to be gentle, but the look on his father’s face lets him know that it failed.

“I didn’t. I would never- not with Lu- *him*,” Tony chokes out. He looks over at Harry and stares, really stares at him for a while, before he lets out a wounded sound and stumbles from the room.

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Loki is pacing up and down in the apartment, glaring at his phone and willing for it to ring. Hávarðr has been out far longer than usual, even taking into account that he's with Peter. He would have texted if he was going to have dinner at Peter's, but no such message has come through, nor is he answering when Loki calls him. He presses the call button again and puts the phone to his ear, listening as it rings and rings and rings and there is no answer. He leaves a message, tone sharp and fearful, asking Hávarðr to call him as soon as possible, but it is the third time he's left such a message and still there is no reply. After another ten minutes without a response, Loki grabs his leather jackets, shifts into his 'Tom Larssen' form and decides to head out and search using his magic. He jerks open the door and halts abruptly, staring at the young man on the other side standing with his arm raised, fist curled and ready to knock. The young man looks at him, confused.

"I thought this was Harry's - *Potter's* place," he says, frowning. Loki growls under his breath. He does not have time for this. His son is missing and he needs to find him *now*.

"And you are?" He demands impatiently.

"Draco Malfoy," the young man returns imperiously. Loki sneers at him.

"Ah yes, Hávarðr's *pen pal*," he snaps. "Shouldn't you be at that farcical educational institution you backwards magic users insist on sending your young to?"

Loki watches in satisfaction as Draco flinches just a little before recovering and standing his ground, albeit a little more nervously than before. *Good, apparently he knows who he's talking to.*

"I left. I came to visit Harry - *Potter*, seeing as he asked for some help on soul magic. I have the books he asked for, is he in? Or has he dashed off with that idiot Parker to go see his father, now that they've found him?"

Loki freezes.

"*What did you say?*"

"Parker did something - what was it? A BMA test? He was going to look in some data thing with it. Harry didn't think it was going to work, but it did, apparently," Draco explains. Loki grabs him by the front of his coat and hauls him inside before waving his hand. The door slams and locks itself even as Loki pulls out his phone once more and calls Hávarðr.

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Tony sits on his bathroom floor, curled in on himself, trembling and shaking with the force of emotions he thought he'd left behind a long time ago. Tears prick at his eyes and he swipes at them furiously as he tries to marshal his thoughts into something logical and ordered and calm but he finds he cannot.

When JARVIS had told him about the DNA match, and he'd found Parker in the intern lab, working on robotics and by all accounts showing great promise, he'd been nervous and at the same time strangely excited at the prospect of being a father. Of course, it turned out that it wasn't Parker at all, but his friend, but that hadn't made a blind bit of difference. Tony still

had a son - and one who wanted to find him; who had been looking for him. He's never really thought of himself as father material. How can he be, when he never had a proper example of how to be a father?

His own father had been alright to begin with, by all accounts, but had steadily got worse as the years went on. He'd been unable to relate to Tony, to talk to him on his level, even though Tony understood far more than he should for his age. Howard had also been too busy, too easily caught up in his work and his inventions and the company and how fast it was all growing to pay attention to how his own son was growing and changing. Tony had needed his father at so many points during his teenage years, but his father was never there to encourage and to help, only to chide and to tear down and Tony had always been afraid that he would be the same.

Of course, there had been many paternity suits over the years, but Tony had been ridiculously uncompromising about contraception, even whilst drunk, because he was convinced he could never be a decent father. And of course, every paternity suit had been disproven and thrown out without even needing any of his attention. Pepper and his legal team had seen to all of it.

When he was with Pepper, he had begun to consider the possibility, as much as it terrified him, especially after seeing that odd video his father had left him that had ended up saving his life. He loved Pepper (even though his love for her paled in comparison to how much he had loved - *still loved* - Lucas) and in the dark of the night when he watched her sleeping, he sometimes thought about it - about the possibility of having a family with her. Cute little redheaded children, running around alternately causing havoc and setting the world to rights. Children he could play with, children he could teach, children who would love DUM-E and U and JARVIS just as much as he did. Children he would love and children he would die for just to see them safe and happy and whole. Of course, the one time he even mentioned it to Pepper, she had shot him down very quickly. She didn't want children. And that was that.

But then there had been Peter Parker - though it was really his friend Harry who he'd been doing the test for. And then Parker had shown him the picture of the kid, all wild dark hair and bright green eyes with a mischievous grin and Tony had been lost. He was going to do his level best to not be as awful as his own father (even though he expected he would fail, dramatically and spectacularly). He wanted to be a father to Harry, in whatever way Harry decided he wanted. He would *try* and try his best.

So he'd messaged Parker, telling him to bring Harry to the Tower and here they were. With Harry being the nephew/son of the man/alien Tony has an acquaintances-with-benefits relationship with, who holds Tony and whispers what sounds like sweet nothings to him in an unidentifiable language whilst Tony is asleep, who may or may not be Tony's lover from years and years ago - the one he would have spent his life with. The one he would have *loved* to have a family with.

Harry is Tony's son. Harry's is Tom Larssen's son. Tom Larssen might be Lucas Thornton (though he has denied it; sort of). Harry might be Tony and Lucas' son (and wouldn't that be *wonderful*).

But if Lucas and Tom are one and the same, why didn't he tell Tony? Why did he leave all those years ago? Why did he come back now, with their son, and start some weird sex-based relationship with Tony instead of just *talking* to him? Why why why why *why*?

Tony breathes deeply and allows himself to calm down slowly. He has his questions for Tom/Lucas (starting with *you're an alien?* and ending in *why didn't you tell me?*) and he will make sure he gets a chance to ask them. But for now, he has a son. A son who is out there because he wanted to meet Tony - to know his *father* - and that is all that matters right now.

With another deep breath, Tony stands, washes and dries his face and emerges from his bathroom feeling calmer and clearer. When he re-enters the living room, the Avengers are still standing around a little awkwardly. Clint and Natasha are staring at the tv screen, which still displays the images Natasha had asked JARVIS for earlier. He glances at the images, still unable to shake the feeling that they looked like someone else altogether, before looking around at the others. Bruce is still studying the DNA from Harry and Tom, flicking the information around on the hologram screens and making notes as he goes. Steve is still sat on the sofa, though not behind Harry anymore. He's talking quietly with Harry and Peter, though mostly Peter, by the looks of it. Harry looks exhausted and worried and more than a little overwhelmed. Tony makes a beeline for the sofa and shoves at Steve.

"Out of the way, Capsicle," he orders. "I've got a kid who needs me."

Steve nods and scrambles off the sofa, allowing Tony to take his place. Tony looks pointedly at Steve for a moment, who eventually gets the hint and vanishes to the kitchen, probably to start dinner.

"I'm sorry," Tony says quietly. Harry looks at him with green eyes full of emotion and Tony has to swallow back the tears again, because there, in that look, that expression, is *Lucas*.

"It's all been a lot crazier than I thought it would be, finding out I had a kid," Tony continues, once he has a hold of himself. "But I want you to know that I don't care if you're an alien, or a human or whatever. You're *mine*. We can sort everything else out as it comes."

"But Tom--"

"I know, Harry," Tony soothes, cautiously reaching out and putting a hand on his son's - *his son!* - arm. Harry sits there stiffly for a moment, before he shifts closer to Tony and relaxes into Tony's side. After a moment's hesitation, Tony wraps his arm around Harry's shoulders. Eventually the awkwardness seeps away, and Tony marvels at how normal it feels, having his son - *his son!* - resting against him like he's been doing it his whole life.

"Tom - or whoever he is - and I will be having a long conversation - which will most likely involve some yelling, I won't deny it, but none of that changes the fact that you're my son."

"But I--"

"And I know that you know more than you've said, but this whole thing puts you in an awkward position and I get that," Tony continues. "It's not your fault, and I'm not going to blame you."

“I’m sorry,” Harry whispers.

“Not your fault.”

They sit in comfortable silence for a little while, before a faint buzzing catches Tony’s attention. He frowns and sits up, looking around and patting at his pockets.

“Well, its not mine,” he mutters. “Someone’s phone going off?”

The other Avengers look at him and shrug. Peter lunges for a rucksack on the floor and eventually pulls out a Starkphone, ringing incessantly.

“Um, Harry?” He says meekly, staring at the screen. Harry, who’d been dozing off next to Tony, hums in response.

“Its Evil Over- uh, Tom. Tom’s calling you.”

*Evil OverTom? What the hell?* Tony tries to decipher that, watching as Harry literally dives for the phone, wide awake and face full of fear. Harry stares at the phone for a few moments before swallowing and answering.

“Hello?” He says quietly. If he strains, Tony can hear rapid-fire questions coming from the other end of the line.

“I’m safe, I promise,” Harry responds. “I’m with Peter - I wasn’t lying about that. I didn’t lie, I swear. You would have known anyway.”

There’s a pause as Harry listens to whatever ‘Tom’ is saying on the other end and then Harry’s suddenly jerks, his mouth dropping open in surprise.

“Draco? Draco’s here? In New York? You’re kidding,” Harry exclaims.

“Who’s Draco?” Tony asks, looking at Peter.

“Friend from the UK. I thought he was at some fancy boarding school though,” Peter answers, shrugging.

“He said that?” Harry says weakly. “He told you that Peter... that I found him?”

Tony watches as Harry sinks back into the sofa, pulling his knees up and curling around them tightly as if to hide from something. He’s about to interrupt and take the phone from Harry, but then Harry starts talking again, only this time, its in that strange language Tony has only heard from JARVIS’ security recordings. Tony freezes for a moment and his world realigns sharply once more, reality sinking in.

“JARVIS,” he says weakly.

“Recording, sir,” JARVIS responds quietly. “Early analysis confirms it is the same language.”

“Someone get Thor here,” Tony says, dazed. “I’ve fucked an alien and had an alien kid. *Jesus.*”

### **Chapter 13: On Parents and Siblings**

Narcissa watches with a sneer as her sister tortures the goblin she’d kidnapped from Gringotts a few weeks ago. Despite the goblins consistently saying that they know nothing about exactly how the Lestrangle vault was infiltrated, Bellatrix seems to think that there is information to be had. Hornfang, the Lestrangle account manager, writhes on the floor in the dust and the dirt, body contorting in almost impossible positions under the cruciatus once more. Narcissa thinks that perhaps she should interrupt.

“Bella, dear, if he knew anything, he would have told you already,” she points out, sipping at her cup of tea and looking back down at her book. Really, it was a waste of her time to be here with her sister, when there were other things she needed to attend to - such as the annual Yule Ball she hosted, as every other Lady Malfoy had before her. It was just over a month until the ball and her list of tasks was still far longer than she wanted it to be. Thank goodness the invitations had already been sent out - no thanks to her husband, who seems unusually distracted and is behaving quite suspiciously. He hadn’t moaned about the Malfoy businesses in quite some time and his secretary had left numerous messages with the house elves inquiring as to whether he had completed the necessary paperwork for this and that and saying that clients were becoming *concerned*. If she didn’t know better, she would think that he was working for the Dark Lord again.

But she does know better. She has heard all about the failed attempt at resurrecting the Dark Lord - not that Lucius told her. No, it had been from Griselda Crabbe that she had heard of the summoning and the strange events that had passed. A lot of it sounded like rumour and hearsay - one of the gods? Unlikely. Still, it would explain Lucius’ strange renewed obsession with the old ways and traditions and the little shrines that have since appeared in many of the Manor’s rooms. She tolerates his little peculiarities, if only because it keeps him distracted from her own plans.

Having her sister free from Azkaban is a necessary evil. Letting her loose to try another resurrection attempt is helpful, if only because it brings Narcissa closer to the trinkets she desires. So far, Bellatrix has been unsuccessful - hence the goblin being tortured. Narcissa cares little for the goblin, though she supposes it is a shame that these old wood floors, as dusty and dirty and neglected as they are, will be stained with inferior goblin blood. She sighs and turns a page in her book, glancing up at her sister. Bellatrix has her knife out now.

“Honestly, Bella, I do believe your time would be better spent searching for one of the other items. A week of torture is only going to set back your plans,” Narcissa adds. Her sister snarls and stabs her knife into the goblin’s arm, twisting it violently. Narcissa looks away, her nose turning upwards in distaste even as her sister ignores her *yet again*. Perhaps she will kill the goblin tonight whilst Bella is asleep. Then her sister won’t be distracted and will resume her search for the items. If Narcissa can get just *one* of those items, then she can begin to work on protecting her Draco and giving him all she wants for him. After all, power is protection, and the Dark Lord was the most powerful wizard to live in the last century. Just a slither of his soul will grant that, especially if the ritual is done correctly.



“Darling, if you do not need my help or my counsel, I will take my leave,” Narcissa calls. “I do have other things to attend to, you know.”

Bellatrix yanks her knife out of the goblin’s ankle and it screams hoarsely. She cackles and licks at the blood that drips from the blade. Narcissa offers her sister a friendly smile, doing her best to conceal her continued disgust.

“Ah yes,” Bella sneers. “Lady Malfoy’s Annual Yule Ball! The society event of the season!”

Narcissa continues to smile serenely.

“These things don’t plan themselves, sister,” she replies. “And if you would but tell me what I can do to help, you know I would. You are my sister, after all, and I would always help you.”

“Help me? What, when you’re not too busy fawning after your spineless, treacherous, filth of a husband?” Bella snaps. “Why my Lord treasured him above other more worthy servants I will never understand. Perhaps if I had cut out that silver tongue of his then my Lord would have seen through his act.”

“Are you accusing Lucius of treachery, Bella? You know he is ever loyal to the Dark Lord, even though he cannot show it.”

Bella scoffs.

“Away with you, Cissy!” She shouts. “Back to your lily-livered get and his toadying father while I do the real work for our Lord.”

Narcissa can feel her smile turn brittle. She will see her son receive what is his - and then her sister will get what is hers.

“If you need me, do call, Bella,” she answers calmly. She rises and collects her clutch before vanishing into the floo with an elegant puff of green powder.

When she arrives back at the Manor, she immediately calls for a house elf to bring her a strong drink and downs it quickly before sinking into her favourite armchair in her personal drawing room. If her sister would just get on with finding the next of the Dark Lord’s trinkets of power, then Narcissa could be finished with her and begin to give her Draco - her precious, precious son - what she wants him to have. Protection, power, glory. All of it for him. She would see him become greater than Merlin himself and she would die trying to ensure his prosperity.

She jerks upright when the floo chimes and peers into the green smoke in the fireplace to see Professor McGonagall’s pinched and worried features. Her heart flutters in her chest at the implications.

“Professor, what can I do to help?” She answers calmly.

“Is Draco at home, Lady Malfoy?” McGonagall asks abruptly. Narcissa frowns.

“Of course not - he’s at Hogwarts,” she replies. Her heart is pounding in her chest now, as her mind rushes through the implications of the old witch’s question.

“I’m afraid not. He left late last night - he said it was a family emergency. If you and your husband wouldn’t mind coming to Hogwarts, Lady Malfoy, I will explain further.”

“I will be there momentarily, Professor,” Narcissa answers, anger and worry curling low in her gut. Her boy - her precious boy - is gone, and apparently the school have no idea where. Narcissa does not know where Lucius is, but calls for a house elf to send her husband an urgent message, even as she pulls on her cloak and steps through the fireplace. She does not need him, though. Narcissa Malfoy will make sure her son is found, alive and well, or there will be hell to pay.

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Loki’s heart is pounding in his chest as he is waved through security in the foyer of Stark Tower and towards the elevators. As soon as the elevator doors close, it ascends faster than he is expecting and his heart leaps into his throat. He is nauseous and fearful and desperation is making him jumpy. From his earlier phone call with Hávarðr, he now knows that Tony knows almost everything - barring that Tom (who is in fact Lucas) is also Loki, the god he fought against just a few years ago.

His hands are shaking and he thinks he is going to be sick as memories push themselves forwards in his mind - memories of events he’d rather have left forgotten. He thinks of Sleipnir, of Fenrir and Hela and Jormungandr, of Narvi and Vali. He thinks of Hávarðr and wonders whether Tony will take this child from him too, just as Odin took the others. He doesn’t think he could bear it, not now that he’s finally been reunited with his son, not now that he’s found a stronger way to conceal himself and his son from Odin. Nothing can be done for his other children, but he has Hávarðr, and that is all that has mattered in these last few months.

But now that Tony knows, it could all come crashing down in a matter of seconds.

The elevator comes to a halt and the doors open smoothly and silently out onto a floor he knows very well. He takes a deep breath and steps out into Tony’s penthouse apartment, eyes scanning the room and noticing that all the Avengers - barring his brother - are there, as well as Peter and Hávarðr. Hávarðr is sat on the sofa, leaning into Tony and from where he is standing, Loki thinks his son might be asleep. He wants to rush over there and scold him, clutch him close and tell him just how *worried sick* he has been, not knowing where Hávarðr was. He wants to tell his son how afraid he is that he’s going to lose him all over again, but he can’t. He can’t, because Tony is in his place and whilst he has longed for such a long time to see Hávarðr and Tony together, as a father and son should be, he is scared to see it now. He is scared to see it, because he knows it means his time with Hávarðr is likely coming to an end.

He hovers for a moment, too unsure, too scared, too *lacking* to do anything, but closes his eyes, breathes deeply, and summons that steely backbone and unyielding confidence he has always faked up on Asgard. He is Loki, even though on the outside he looks like Tom Larssen, and he will not forget it.

He strides across the room, under the watchful eye of the Avengers and pauses just behind the sofa.

“Hávarðr,” he calls.

He watches as Hávarðr stirs from where he is lying against Tony. His son’s head and shoulders appears over the back of the couch looking worried and miserable and all Loki wants to do in that moment is scoop him up and hold him close.

“*Móðir*,” he whispers. “I’m sorry.”

Loki’s heart breaks and he steps closer, hands reaching for his son. He almost reaches Hávarðr, but an arm blocks him.

“No,” Tony says, leaping over the back of the couch and positioning himself between Hávarðr and Loki. “No, you don’t get to go near him until you explain everything.”

Tony’s tone is hard and unyielding and he glares up at Loki in the way Loki assumes he reserves for villains. The last time he had seen this particular glare, after all, had been during the invasion, aimed at himself. Loki’s own anger ignites at being denied access to his son, but he grasps hold of it and keeps it under tight rein for the moment.

“Tony,” Loki says evenly, as calmly as he can manage. The anger licks like flames underneath his skin. Instead, he allows a salacious smirk to slip across his face briefly. It is worth it to see Tony slightly wrong-footed and swallowing against arousal in an entirely inappropriate situation. Tony recovers quickly though, his temper taking over any other thoughts he might have when faced with his acquaintance-with-benefits.

“The agreement was I would let you up here if you would explain what the hell is going on,” Tony reminds him hotly. The deal had been negotiated about half an hour ago over the phone with Hávarðr as the intermediary, when it had been revealed that Tony had worked out pretty much everything. Loki nods, but takes the opportunity to move Tony just a little to the left so he can walk around him to reach Hávarðr.

“And I will explain, as per our agreement, once I have seen that my son is alright,” he answers coolly. Tony bristles at his words, but says nothing as Loki rounds the sofa and crouches in front of Hávarðr. Even though he is painfully aware of all of the Avengers, Peter and Tony watching him, he gently reaches out to place a hand on Hávarðr’s cheek. Hávarðr turns into his touch and Loki cannot help the small smile that spreads across his face. His anger slips away as he sees his son healthy and whole.

“Did Draco really turn up at the apartment?” Hávarðr asks. Loki laughs, unable to stop the sound choking with emotion.

“Yes, he did,” he replies. “I have left him there for the moment, though he is eager to see you, despite all his protestations to the contrary. He still swears his is not your friend. What an odd child he is.”

Hávarðr laughs wetly and brings a hand up to grip Loki by the wrist.

*“I am sorry, Móðir. I didn’t mean for this to happen,”* Hávarðr whispers, switching to Elderspeak. Loki offers him a sad smile.

*“I know, Hávarðr. I know you only wanted to find your father. But perhaps now you see why I was so hesitant.”*

*“But surely if you tell him - if you tell him what you told me about the torture - about being forced to do it, then he will understand and things will be okay. You can be together again.”*

Hávarðr’s voice is small and sad and Loki would move mountains just to never hear his son so sad again, but he cannot let Hávarðr believe that everything will be as he wants it to be. It would be wrong to do so.

*“The realms do not work in such a way, Hávarðr. There is more hurt and anguish there than what was borne from the invasion.”*

Hávarðr opens his mouth to respond, but Tony jumps in, irritated and angry.

“Okay, that’s enough. You promised an explanation,” he demands. Loki sighs and rises from his crouched position to stare down Tony and the gathered Avengers. Out of the corner of his eye, he watches Peter shift closer to Hávarðr and mentally thanks the boy for being such a good friend to his son.

“I did,” he admits. “What do you wish to know?”

Tony scowls.

“You need to start talking and fast before I do something I might later regret.”

“I… I am not sure where to start,” Loki admits, holding his hands out guilelessly. Before Tony can speak again, Banner jumps in, pulling a holoscreen out of the air and bringing up a diagram of what Loki can only assume is his DNA.

“You’re not human, clearly,” Banner states. “Alien?”

“By your designation, yes. I am what you would call an alien.”

“But you look human,” Barton points out, staring at Loki curiously. Loki wonders how long it will be before Barton catches some eerily familiar mannerism and discovers who Loki really is. Besides his brother, Barton is the one Avenger who could likely recognise him beneath his disguises.

“A lot of the races across the universe look similar to yours. There are differences in colour of skin, perhaps, but what you consider to be the human form is common.”

“How did you get here?” The Captain asks, his stance all at once defensive and intrigued. He is a strange being full of contradictions that Loki would find fascinating under other circumstances, but he is not here to study the Captain.

“I Skywalked,” he says with an unrepentant grin. “Not to be confused with any characters in Star Wars, naturally, this particular skill predates those films by a few millennia.”

Barton snickers and Banner is smiling just a little, but a glare from the Widow silences them both.

“I came here a long time ago to see how this realm fared compared to my memory of it. My people live a long time and it had been many centuries since I had last visited earth. I was pleasantly surprised by the progress and decided to stay a while. I did not intend to form any kind of romantic entanglement whilst here, but as you humans say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions and I met someone,” Loki pauses, his eyes shifting to rest on Tony. Tony’s eyes meet his for a moment and Loki can see desperation and heartache and anger in them and he closes his eyes and shifts. He hears the gasps of the Avengers but does not open his eyes immediately. He feels Hávarðr’s hand reach out and clutch his own reassuringly and he carries on.

“This is the form I wore about sixteen years ago, when I arrived back on earth and when I met an extraordinary man with knowledge beyond his years and his world, and ambitions beyond any of his peers. I am glad to see that has not changed in the intervening years,” Loki says, opening his eyes with great effort. Tony’s gaze is fixed on him, and there are tears which match Loki’s own gathering in his eyes. He wants to reach out and gather Tony into his arms like he used to, but knows that it would be unwelcome - *beyond* unwelcome, especially after everything that has passed between them, especially after all of the lies.

“Lucas,” Tony whispers. Loki drops his gaze, unable to deal with the raw emotion and sheer longing in Tony’s eyes - not when he knows what is coming.

“So... you screwed around with Stark, got pregnant and what?” Barton asks crassly.

“Clint!” The Captain protests as Tony glares at Barton, but Loki does not mind the rudeness. It lightens the atmosphere a little and takes the focus off his relationship with Tony just a little.

“Exactly *how* did you get pregnant? Well, you are an alien, and I can see from your DNA that there are physiological differences, but... call it scientific curiosity?” Banner says, eyes flicking between the data on the holoscreen and Loki.

“My species are intersexed and I am a shapeshifter. Meaning that whatever form I choose to take, be it male or female, I am capable of conceiving. I did not think it would be possible with a human, but I was wrong,” he admits.

“So why did you leave?” Tony asks, his voice hoarse and coloured with the beginnings of righteous anger. “You could have told me. You *should* have told me!”

“I would have told you if I thought it safe, please believe me. There was nothing I wanted more than to share it with you at the time, but there were more things at play than you knew about. Besides the possibility of becoming a scientific curiosity for humans, on my home world, my children are hunted - killed or imprisoned for reasons outside of my control and I could not let that happen any longer,” Loki says, choking on his words. He clutches Hávarðr’s hand tightly as the ghostlike memories of his other children clamour loudly in his

head. "So I ran away and I hid Hávarðr with a mortal couple in England, hoping to give him a peaceful life. But things do not always work out the way we want them to."

Hávarðr tugs on his hand and Loki allows himself to fall back onto the sofa where Hávarðr immediately pulls him into a hug as the tremors and tears for his other children overtake him. Hávarðr has not asked about his siblings beyond that first time Loki mentioned them, but he knows that the subject is a hard one for Loki to even think about let alone speak about. He holds Hávarðr tightly to him, ignoring the Avengers and Tony and any questions they might have for the moment.

He focuses in on the feel and scent of his son, of how relaxed Hávarðr is in his arms and allows it to soothe his soul. He breathes deeply, trying to calm himself even as his thoughts begin to take a darker path. He rescued Hávarðr in that graveyard because he was in trouble. He dealt with the threat of Odin in what he thought was the best way possible at the time. He had expected to lead a quiet life with Hávarðr on Midgard. That chance of a quiet life has been swept out from underneath them. All this clamour will have no doubt caught the attention of Heimdall, from his station on the Bifrost.

Odin may be in the Odinsleep, and Loki may have concocted a way to keep himself and Hávarðr hidden from Odin's sight, but he did not remember Heimdall nor did he remember Heimdall's dislike of him. He did not think hiding them from Asgard's Gatekeeper would be important, not when he intended for them to live quietly. But the clamour of the Avengers even without Thor's presence will be enough to draw Heimdall's eye and when it is revealed that it is in fact Loki who is Hávarðr's mother...

Hávarðr is no longer safe. Not as long as Loki stays here with him. He grips Hávarðr just a little tighter as he decides what he must do.

*"I love you, Hávarðr,"* he murmurs. *"So much, my darling."*

"We could have worked something out. I would have done anything - *anything* - to protect you and Harry. You *know* that I would. You could have told me!" Tony says lowly, his voice full of anger and hurt. "I would have given you everything. I love - *loved* you, Lucas."

Loki looks up at Tony through watery eyes and smiles.

"I know," he says quietly. He opens his mouth to continue, but JARVIS interrupts.

"Sir, judging by the sudden storm outside, I believe Mr Odinson is about to arrive."

Loki jerks upright at the news, dislodging Hávarðr who cries out in protest. His eyes trace the darkened skies outside and the flashes of lightning lighting up the night and he knows his time is up. He stands from the sofa and turns to face Hávarðr again.

*"Stay with your father, Hávarðr. He and his Avengers will protect you. He already loves you as I do,"* Loki instructs, tears blurring his vision slightly. He knows Hávarðr realises what he's about to do when his son grips his wrist tightly.

*"Móðir-"*

Loki kisses his son's forehead tenderly.

*"I am so proud of you, Hávarðr. And I love you, so much."*

*"Móðir, please!"*

*"Be safe, dear heart. Maybe one day I will see you again,"* Loki pulls his wrist from Hávarðr's grip and takes a few steps back, even as Hávarðr scrambles to get to him.

*"Don't you dare, Móðir! Don't you-"*

In flash of green-gold, Loki teleports.

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Harry doesn't remember much about the moments that follow. He sits catatonic on the sofa, frozen, even as he feels as though he is shaking apart. He thinks he is crying, but he isn't sure. All he can see is Loki - his *Móðir* teleporting away in that beautiful green-gold shimmer. He feels Peter next to him; he thinks Peter is talking to him, but he doesn't know what his friend is saying.

His mind whirls. He's only just gotten his parents - *both of them* - back and now one is gone again. Harry has no idea how to find Loki or where he would even begin to find someone like his *Móðir*. He thinks he knows why Loki left. He understands that Loki means to protect him from Odin, from what happened to Harry's unknown siblings, but he wishes it didn't have to be this way. Not with so much still unresolved. Not when his father can't help. Not when his father doesn't even know his help is needed. Harry had thought that Loki had dealt with Odin, but apparently, whatever has happened here today, with Harry finding his father, means that somehow, whatever protection Loki had wrought has been undone.

Harry feels a hand touch him tentatively on the arm and he turns his head slightly. His father is standing there, unsure and angry and confused and though Harry can tell Tony wants to help, he just wants Loki. He just wants his *Móðir*. He looks away from his father.

"Harry?" Tony asks. "Did you hear me?"

Harry shrugs. He has no idea what Tony - his *father* - said.

"Do you know where Tom - Lucas - *your mom* - has gone?" Tony repeats. Harry feels the sob growing in his chest as he shakes his head. It breaks a moment later and his body wrenches violently with the force of his tears. Through blurry eyes, he can see the Avengers standing around awkwardly, unsure what to do with a bawling teenager whose alien mother just vanished and left him behind with a father he has literally only just met. Harry feels Peter's hand slip into his own and squeeze gently and he calms a little bit, even as his father settles awkwardly on his other side and hugs him again.

"JARVIS, can we get the guest room by mine set up please?" Tony says quietly.

“Of course, sir. Also, Mr Odinson has arrived on his own floor. Shall I direct him here?” JARVIS replies. His cool tones are somewhat soothing and Harry focuses on the sound and on his breathing for a moment, trying to get calm.

“Sure thing, J,” Tony answers. Quiet falls in the living area of the penthouse and Harry watches through sleepy eyes as the other Avengers slip out to the kitchen or to do other things for the moment. Peter catches sight of time and says goodbye in a rush, hoping not end up worrying Aunt May, and Harry is left alone with his father.

“You’re staying here with me, kid,” Tony says after a while. “In case that wasn’t obvious. And Parker said we should probably find your friend that’s turned up from England. I’ll send Steve and one of the others to do that in a minute.”

Harry opens his mouth to speak, but is distracted by the elevator doors opening once more and a tall, muscled man in stonewashed jeans and a plaid shirt walks out onto the floor. His blonde hair is wet but tied back and he grins widely. Harry does not need to be introduced to know that this is Thor, his *Móðir*’s brother and his own uncle.

“My friends!” He says loudly in greeting. Tony waves a hand in the air to catch Thor’s attention.

“Hey Mr Universe, over here,” he calls. Thor wanders over, pausing to catch a beer that is thrown in his direction from the kitchen, and sits in the nearby armchair.

“Stark,” he says, opening the beer and taking a swig. “JARVIS said you needed my help.”

Tony shifts next to Harry and pulls up one of his holoscreens. Harry watches as some of the same information as earlier is brought up. He listens as Tony explains the situation, realising that his father is trying to cover up all the hurt that Loki has left him with. He burrows a little deeper into his father’s side, hoping he can give back to Tony some of the comfort he’s getting.

“So you slept with an alien?” Thor asks, apparently amused.

“Yes, yes, I did. Okay, yes, Stark’s a man-whore, heard it all before, heard it from Katniss today as well. That’s beside the point. The guy was here, he did some explaining - but not much - and then he left - vanished in a puff of smoke or light or whatever. So, I was wondering if you were capable of translating some stuff for me.”

“I may not know their native language, but the Allspeak does much, Stark,” he answers. His gaze shifts to Harry. “And this is your son?”

Harry feels Tony’s arm tighten around him.

“Yeah. This is Harry. Got some long fancy name which I can’t pronounce, but Harry is just as good. Poor kid’s had a bit of a rough ride today, Thor,” Tony sighs.

“It is good to meet you, Harry,” Thor says quietly, with a small smile. “Well, Stark, let me hear it.”



“JARVIS,” Tony says and then Harry hears it. His *Móðir*’s soothing, calming tones, whispering sweet words of endearment and love and speaking about Harry. Harry can feel the tears welling up again as he listens to his *Móðir*’s love - love for Harry, love for Tony - and heartache.

When he looks up, Thor’s brow is furrowed.

“What trickery is this?” He murmurs, listening to the recording. Harry watches as a myriad of emotions - grief, anger, joy, fear - pass over his uncle’s face before it resolves into something calm. Thor gets up from his seat, puts down his beer, and kneels in front of Harry.

“*You are my nephew, are you not?*” He says gently. Tired and lost and hurting, Harry finds himself unable to lie any longer.

“Yes,” he replies. Thor smiles.

“*Is your Móðir safe?*”

“*I don’t know. He left. But I think he left to protect me.*”

“*From our father, I know,*” Thor sounds sad. He reaches out and his hand finds the back of Harry’s neck, resting there reassuringly. “*I will keep you safe here and hopefully your Móðir will return soon. I know I have words for him, and I am sure your father will too, when he finds out the rest of this complicated tale my brother has woven.*”

Harry can’t help grinning in response to Thor’s own and he feels his mood lift just a little.

“Um... excuse me?” Tony says indignantly. “You too, Hammertime? So he’s Asgardian, then?”

Thor settles back into his chair and takes a drink from his beer. He laughs and the rumble of it sounds like the beginnings of a storm. Harry watches his uncle in awe.

“Aesir,” Thor corrects. “And whilst he apparently speaks the Elderspeak, I know of no Aesir man that can give birth, Stark.”

“So, you have no idea about him then?”

“I did not say that. I know of only one man who speaks the Elderspeak, can appear as either Aesir or human and can give birth. Of course, I didn’t need to know any of that - not when I recognise his voice,” Thor comments, giving Harry a wink. He’s clearly enjoying dragging this out and infuriating Tony.

“Thor-!”

Thor grins.

“I’m afraid, my friend, that you and I need to have a discussion about your intentions towards my brother.”

## **Chapter 14: On Loki and Wizards**

*Tony turns around when he hears Lucas returning from the bathroom and when he sees his partner, his breath stutters in his chest. Lucas is wearing a dove grey suit, waistcoat neatly buttoned over his crisp white shirt. His tie is knotted neatly, a muted pastel blue that matches his pocket square. His hair is tamed with just a little bit of product and the small, quiet smile he gives Tony as he buttons his jacket, ready to leave, is breathtaking in its beauty. Tony freezes in the process of fastening his cuff links and just stares. Lucas laughs quietly and crosses the bedroom to give Tony a tender kiss.*

*“We will be late, darling,” he murmurs, taking hold of Tony’s shirt cuffs and deftly threading the cufflink through. Tony gathers himself and grins.*

*“We could be even later,” he suggests with a wink, reaching with fingers itching to touch and to hold. Lucas bats his hands away playfully.*

*“Patience is a virtue, Tony,” he replies. “And Obadiah would certainly have something to say if we were late.”*

*“I’m really not all that virtuous,” Tony quips, managing to unbutton Lucas’s jacket and slip his hands inside to Lucas’ waist. Lucas rolls his eyes and carefully extracts himself before Tony can cause any further damage.*

*“Well then, perhaps think of it as delayed gratification. I’m sure the anticipation will be worthwhile.”*

*Tony barely resists whining in disappointment as Lucas buttons his jacket once more.*

*“But-”*

*“Sir, Mr Hogan is outside with the car,” JARVIS interrupts. Lucas holds out Tony’s own suit jacket expectantly. Tony goes to take it, but instead grasps Lucas’s wrist. Gently, he draws it to his lips and presses a kiss to the exposed skin. Lucas moves closer, his nose finding Tony’s hair and Tony feels the fleeting touch of lips just by his ear. He twists and looks up into Lucas’ eyes.*

*“You look amazing,” he says quietly. Lucas smiles.*

*“Thank you. You’re quite stunning yourself,” Lucas replies.*

*“I... um... I never expected to have this. To have someone, I mean, someone who cares for me like you do,” Tony starts, stumbling over his words in a rush to get them out. His heart flutters in his chest as he watches Lucas’s eyes soften and his smile grow. “So... um... thank you. For being you, I guess, and, um, caring for me. I... er... I can’t imagine anyone else with me, and I don’t want anyone else with me, so, um... I just want you to know - I mean, you don’t have to say it back or anything, and oh, god, I sound like a kid in high school, but-”*

*Lucas silences him with a kiss.*

*“I know, darling. I love you too.”*

*Tony grinds to a halt and swallows hard as he looks Lucas in the eyes.*

*“Yeah?” He croaks. “That’s... that’s great.”*

*Lucas grins and pulls away. He keeps hold of Tony’s hand though, twining their fingers together and pulling gently.*

*“We will be late, Tony.”*

*Tony starts to move, but then stops, gently pulling on Lucas’s hand.*

*“I love you, Lucas.”*

*Lucas just smiles and kisses him.*

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Tony stares at the pictures on the holoscreen that he’d pulled up. On the left is Tom Larssen, his not-friend-with-benefits for the past couple of months. He is half naked and smirking, eyes lit with some private amusement. On the right is Lucas Thornton, his former lover, the one he would have spent his life with if given the chance. This had always been his favourite picture of Lucas - in that grey suit he’d worn to the gala six months before he vanished, that night where they’d said they loved one another... Tony tears his eyes away as he feels that long buried emotion rearing its head once more and instead turns to the final picture in the middle.

In the middle is Loki, blue eyes manic and gleaming, lips split in a sinister grin from within the Hulk cage on the SHIELD helicarrier. His face is gaunt, sharp lines delineated by shadows and bruising. For all his manic pretence, he looks tired; Tony had thought it at the time, but its even more apparent now as he look at the picture again. He looks between the three pictures, thinking and trying not to feel. Three faces but all one person. All belong to the God of Mischief - the God of *Lies* - and Tony isn’t sure what to think. He doesn't know how to reconcile the insane god after world domination with sexy, *dirty-talking* Tom and gentle, loving Lucas. How can they all be one person?

When Thor had told him the news - *shitty way to break that kind of news, Thundercat* - he hadn’t believed it at first, but once Thor had had his fun at Tony’s expense, he had explained properly. Loki, who had been thought to be dead, wasn’t. Somehow, he had fooled Thor back on Svartalfheim and had been up to who knew what ever since. Harry had chipped in then, saying Loki had known he was in danger and had come to rescue him and subsequently moved him to New York where they lived together. Pushing aside the fact that his son had been in danger - Harry wouldn’t say what had happened, just that Loki had rescued him - and the fact that there was a lot Harry was glossing over, Tony had tried to wrap his head around the fact that Loki - Thor’s megalomaniacal (adopted) younger brother who tried to conquer Earth - was in fact both Tom *and* Lucas. Tony had cut the conversation short at that point and instead showed Harry his room, before Steve had called everyone for dinner. Tony had escaped to his workshop after dinner, asking JARVIS to keep an eye on Harry and make sure the other Avengers were looking after him.

And that's where he is now, licking his wounds and trying to make sense of everything he has learned today. He sighs and stares at the images in front of him, his eyes perpetually drawn to Lucas's smiling face and his head full of the memories of the time they'd had together. His eyes burn with the effort of holding back his tears, but he does not want to cry over this. Not now, not all these years later. He would rather be angry, but instead he feels tired. Reaching into his pocket, he pulls out a crumpled piece of paper, faded with age and torn and repaired numerous times. He spreads it out on the surface of the work bench he's sitting at and reads it yet again. Even with the knowledge he has now, of who really wrote this letter and who had really been by his side all that time and *why* he had left, even with all that, it still reads honestly.

Tony hates it. He hates that something written by a goddamned liar - someone who lied to his face for eighteen months and then again more recently - rings true with every word. There is incredible sincerity that pours off the page as he reads it yet again and he wishes he could be rid of it. He wishes that every time he tore it apart, never wanting to see it ever again, he wouldn't then feel the need to repair it and keep it, knowing it's the last thing of the only person he'd ever loved fully and properly. When he'd first read it, the sincerity had been there, but it had been muddled by the mystery of absent explanations and the hurt of unexpected abandonment. Reading it now and knowing what he now knows about Lucas's - *Loki's* - hunted, tortured, *murdered* children, Tony's heart clenches in his chest. He thinks of Harry - of his son that he's only known a few hours - and of the fate of Loki's other children and he wonders if he would have done the same. It makes him sick to think he probably would have.

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When he reappears in his apartment, Loki barely holds himself together. All he can think of is Tony's heartbroken, angry eyes and of Hávarðr, crying and pleading for him to stay. Hávarðr's shouts linger and echo in his ears as he pauses for a moment before opening his eyes to see Hávarðr's friend, sitting awkwardly on the sofa and looking around, irritated and confused. He looks at Loki and jumps to his feet.

"Well? Where's Ha - Potter?" The boy demands. Ordinarily, Loki might raise an incredulous eyebrow at the rudeness of the boy's tone, but he has no time to waste on that now.

"With his father," he grits out. "Someone will collect you shortly."

"What? But what about-? I thought-"

"Hávarðr will be living with his father from now on. I need to go away for some time. You will be well cared for," Loki says, attempting to be reassuring. The boy just looks more confused and a little lost before something sparks in his eyes and his gaze narrows thoughtfully.

"Is it about the soul piece in Potter's head? I brought the books he asked for, if those will help," he offers, reaching into the trunk that is at his feet. He pulls out a stack of five ancient but well-kept tomes and puts them on the coffee table in front of him. Loki flicks his wrist and the books vanish into one of his many pocket dimensions. The boy's mouth drops open inelegantly.

“Thank you,” Loki says, transforming his clothes with a thought to his Asgardian travelling leathers.

“You’re welcome,” the boy says absently as he watches Loki, wide-eyed in wonder. Loki pays him little mind as he turns on his heel and teleports away. Hávarðr will make sure he is looked after.

With several jumps across the world, Loki makes his way to the most secluded portal to the World Tree and Skywalks his way back to Asgard. Concealed and invisible to all around him, he stalks through the Palace to Odin’s chambers, breathing a sigh of relief when he enters. With a little prodding of the wards he had set the last time he was here, he finds that Odin slumbers on still - both the illusion he’d set for the Court and the real Odin, hidden in one of the many secret chambers only Odin - or Loki-as-Odin - had access to.

Deep in the hidden chamber, Loki sits at the foot of the real Odin’s bed. He stares at his not-father and considers resuming his position as Odin, but as soon as the thought crosses his mind, he feels a bone-deep weariness creep up on him. Perhaps this is why the Allfather sleeps, he wonders. The stresses and strains of ruling Asgard, but also of watching and keeping in line the Nine Realms is exhausting. He thinks of Hávarðr. He thinks of his other children - transformed, banished, locked away, dead. He snarls at his sleeping not-father.

“You don’t know what it is to be a parent,” he hisses, suddenly furious. “You squandered the best opportunity ever given to you.”

He thinks of Hávarðr again. Of how he left his son and of how he left Tony without telling him the full truth - though he is certain Thor will have informed him as soon as he learned everything - and of the uncertainty Hávarðr must be feeling. He thinks of the books Hávarðr’s friend has given him and the monster playing at being a man he’d encountered when he’d rescued Hávarðr all those months ago.

“I will not squander mine,” he resolves. He stands and moves so he is standing by the Allfather’s head. With a deft twist of his fingers, he casts a spell and the green-gold of his magic snakes in through Odin’s left ear and into his brain.

“Enjoy your dreams, *Allfather*,” he sneers as he leaves. He has more important work to accomplish. Hávarðr may be safe with his father and the Avengers, but that is only for now and he still needs Loki’s help.

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When Draco arrives at the Tower, he is immediately shown to what he is told is Harry’s bedroom. The door is shut and the man with him - Captain Rogers, he thinks - knocks on the door and calls through cautiously. There is no answer, so the man gently opens the door and leans in.

“Harry, Draco’s here,” he says. Looking past the man, Draco can see that the room is dark, the curtains drawn. He thinks Harry may be lying on the bed, curled up and underneath the covers, but he isn’t certain. When there is no response from the bed, the man frowns and looks at Draco.

“Maybe we’ll just get you settled in your own room,” he comments, glancing between the gap in the doorway and Draco. A hoarse voice calls out.

“No, he can come in. Please,” Harry says, sounding exhausted and emotional and Draco doesn’t think he’s ever heard Harry sound like this before, not even with all the disasters he’d been involved in at Hogwarts.

“If you’re sure,” Captain Rogers replies, opening the door wider for Draco to go in. If you need food, come find us, or ask JARVIS.”

“Yes, the invisible house elf in the ceiling,” Draco answers, remembering what he’d been told when he’d arrived and been greeted by the polite British voice he couldn’t see. Granted, it had been better spoken than most house elves, but given what they said JARVIS could do, he thought that was the most apt comparison. Captain Rogers gives him a confused look before shaking his head and leaving. When the man had arrived at the apartment, he had let himself in with what was apparently Harry’s key and had proceeded to try to explain that Draco needed to go with him. Draco had only been convinced when the man had resorted to what was approximately a floo call on a small object which had shown him a much better quality picture of Harry than any Wizarding fireplace could. For a muggle invention, Draco thought it was quite clever.

Draco enters the room cautiously and shuts the door behind him.

“*Lumos*,” he murmurs, wand held out in front of him. The tip glows, and he finds himself better able to see the room he’s in. Its quite large, and there are two doors in one of the walls - one must lead to a bathroom, he thinks, but he is uncertain about the other. A discarded rucksack lies against one wall, but other than that the room is clean and neat. It is furnished in much the same style as the rest of the penthouse apartment that Draco had seen so far - sleek and shiny and altogether stranger than Wizarding tastes in decor. It is all so foreign and interesting to Draco, and he would ask as many questions of his friend - *not-friend* as possible, but he was right in his first thoughts. Harry *is* curled up under the covers on the bed, only now Draco can see that he is shaking and he can hear the sounds of sobs and he immediately feels awkward and unsure. He thinks of Pansy and her crying fits and wishes he could be elsewhere for a moment, but this is Harry and he is different to Pansy - he’s a boy, at least, which should make this less disgusting than those times when Pansy had cried all over him.

Draco sits on the edge of the bed with his back to Harry.

“Well, I made it, Potter,” he comments. “Told you I would get to New York somehow. If mother wasn’t going to let me transfer to NYAMA, then I thought I’d better find a way myself.”

No response.

“Besides, Hogwarts is getting worse, you know. Especially with Uncle Sev ill and not teaching. Father won’t let me see him - apparently its too contagious and he doesn’t want me catching it. Nevermind that I had all my Wizvacs when I was a child,” Draco scoffs. Harry’s sobs start to quiet.

“So where’s Parker then? I thought he’d be attached to you at the hip like Granger and Weasley were, from how you wrote about him.”

“He went home,” Harry mutters.

“I suppose I’ll have to meet him and see if he’s up to scratch another day then. Nothing but the best for the Saviour of the Wizarding World after all,” Draco quips. Harry snorts.

“Not that anymore. They all think I’m dead,” he replies.

“Except me,” Draco points out. “Me, your hated enemy. I knew I was smarter than Granger.”

He glances over at Harry to see that he’s rolled over and is propped up on his elbows, staring at Draco incredulously, eyes red and sore from crying, face pale and tired.

“You? Smarter than Hermione?” Harry snorts. “And seriously, get over yourself. We’re friends, alright?”

“Not-friends,” Draco corrects, pleased he’s managed to get *something* out of Harry.

“What?”

“Not-friends. It has a hyphen in it,” he explains, proudly. Harry rolls his eyes and lies back down.

“Whatever,” he mutters. “And put that light out. You’re breaking the Statute of Secrecy.”

Draco hastily ends the *lumos* he’d cast.

“I forgot about that,” he comments, scratching at his neck.

“You did magic in front of them, didn’t you?”

“I may have.”

“You’re such an idiot, Malfoy.”

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When Tony emerges from his workshop the following morning, he immediately heads to Harry’s room. According to JARVIS, Harry’s friend had arrived with Steve the previous evening and hasn’t left Harry’s room since. Steve had taken them some food at some point in the evening, but JARVIS had reported that only one portion had been eaten. As he stands outside the door to Harry’s room, Tony feels angry. Angry on behalf of Harry, who was abandoned with strangers as a child and has again been abandoned by his mother after they had been reunited. Sure, he’s angry with Loki for all the deceit and the lies, sure he doesn’t know whether that what he had with Lucas was real or not and that makes him *furious*, but to abandon their child? Tony hadn’t been abandoned, but he’d sure as hell had an absent parent, so he knows what that loneliness is like.

He breathes deeply, trying to get control of his anger, and then knocks on the door before opening it. The room is a wreck. His eyes fly wide and he shouts for JARVIS to get the lights on immediately as he pushes into the room. The curtains are hanging haphazardly and are full of tears and holes. Some of the furniture is in minute pieces strewn across the carpet (which has various burn holes in it), other pieces of furniture are barely held together. At least two of the four pillows on the bed have burst, leaving white feathers scattered across everything, intermingled with torn bits of paper and books. Aside from the pillows, the bed is surprisingly intact. Harry is lying face down in the middle of it, in the same clothes he was wearing the previous day when he'd arrived to meet Tony for the first time. Another teenager, who he assumes is Harry's friend, is lying across the bottom of the bed, reading a thick book. Harry turns his head to look in Tony's direction and all words vanish from Tony's mind.

Harry - *his son* - looks exhausted and distraught and Tony doesn't really know what to say or do. His mind is blank, but somehow his feet manage to carry him across the room to the bed. He isn't 100% sure what happened, but Harry's mother is Loki, so it stands to reason that this is probably some kind of magic-related disaster. He sits awkwardly on the edge of the bed, aware that he needs to comfort his son, but uncertain how to do it. After a moment where he can't really decide whether to put his hand on Harry's arm or not, he leaves it there and squeezes gently.

"I've seen worse," he comments idly. "Pretty sure Bruce has *done* worse."

Harry turns his face away and doesn't reply. There is an awkward silence for a while as Tony tries to find something else to say.

"You know, the rest of the gang would love to meet you properly," he offers. "Cap'll have breakfast on the table by now if you're both hungry."

"No thanks," Harry mutters. The other boy lowers his book.

"After the amount of magic you expended last night food would do you some good," he comments. Tony lifts an eyebrow. So it *is* magic that's responsible.

"What's your name, kid?" He asks. The boy frowns at him.

"Draco Malfoy. And you are?" He sneers. Tony stares at the boy for a moment and then watches as Harry kicks him.

"My dad, you idiot," Harry says.

"I don't know which Merlin-forsaken muggle is your father, Potter. I was never introduced!"

"Draco!" Harry hisses, clearly angry. The curtain rail shakes and a patch of carpet catches alight.

"*Shit, what the hell?!*" Tony breathes, rushing to the bathroom to get water. By the time he's returned with a pitiful cup, Draco has some kind of stick in his hand.



“*Aguamenti*,” he says, and a powerful jet of water comes out of the stick onto the fire. It extinguishes with a hiss. Harry lifts himself up on his elbows and glares at his friend.

“Seriously, what did I tell you?” He snaps. Draco looks a little sheepish and hides the stick in a pocket as Tony watches the entire scene with mounting confusion.

“What the hell just happened?” He asks, dazed.

“Draco, I want to talk to my dad. Go get breakfast, or something,” Harry says, lying back down and staring at the ceiling. Draco rolls his eyes and leaves the room without another word. When the door shuts, Tony heads back to the bed and sits on it, his back against the headboard. He reaches down carefully with one hand and rests it on Harry’s head. He wonders at how like his own hair Harry’s is, silky yet wild and untameable with a mind of its own. He lets his fingers stroke through it gently.

“Just so you know, your friend is weird,” he comments. Harry snorts.

“I know,” he replies quietly.

“Strange taste in insults too. I’ve never been called a *muggle* before. Not quite sure what it means, but I think it was an insult. I mean, he sneered when he said it. He’s got a weird name too. Who names their kid *Draco*?” Tony rambles.

“Constellation,” Harry says tiredly. “Family tradition.”

“Well, that’s a family tradition I won’t be using. No kid would thank their parents for naming them *Big Dipper*,” Tony tries. He knows it’s a weak attempt at a joke, but he sees the small smile that briefly appears on Harry’s face. Harry turns his head so he’s looking at Tony.

"He saved me, you know," He says quietly. "I was about to die and he just appeared, took out the guy going to kill me and saved my life. No one had ever done that before. I was always saving other people."

"Okay, so first off, I'm going to leave that whole situation alone for now even though my brain is going *what the hell were you doing that meant you needed saving*. Second, I get what you're trying to say, kid, and I'm not going to argue with you. I could see it, even when I was so angry and so hurt I couldn't see straight. He *loves* you, more than anything. He'd clearly do anything for you. I'm not going to make any comments about that. It's just that there's a whole lot of shit that happened a couple of years ago that-

"The invasion?"

"Yeah, Harry. Just a little bit of world domination that he tried to indulge in," Tony quips, his tone slightly bitter. Harry flinches and Tony immediately feels guilty.

"He was forced," Harry mutters. "Tortured then mind controlled and he's got the scars to prove it. I've seen them."

Tony lifts an eyebrow. He's skeptical about that revelation. Loki could have told Harry anything to explain away the invasion and Harry would have believed it. Still, it is an option worth exploring, he supposes. Maybe Thor knows something.

"I'll look into it," he offers. "Now how about you come get some breakfast? And then I can see about getting someone in to deal with this mess."

Harry flushes red as he sits up slowly and looks about the room sheepishly.

"Um, about that... I... er... kind of lost control of my magic..."

"What?"

"My magic gets too much when I experience a lot of emotion all at once. I've not quite learned to control it yet. Inflated my Aunt Marge once. Set free a snake at a zoo. Appeared on a roof."

Tony eyes Harry for a moment, not quite sure he can believe the words coming out of his son's mouth.

"Okay, so I figured you had some kind of magic - I mean, your mom's *Loki* and ugh that is so weird and I don't think I'm ever going to get used to it, but what about your friend? Pretty sure he did something weird and possibly magical too? What, is he your twin, or something? Please tell me I don't have two kids."

Harry laughs.

"Draco? My brother? No," he scoffs. "We went to school together for the last four years - Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Hogwarts School of what now?" Tony repeats, stunned.

"There's hidden communities of human magic users around the world. I grew up in one and so did Draco."

"And what about the Statute of Secrecy, Potter?" Draco drawls, appearing in the doorway with a croissant in hand.

"What about it? You've already shown everyone that you can do magic, so what does it matter if I tell my *dad* about it? And I'm not even a human wizard!" Harry argues.

"I know that, Potter," Draco rolls his eyes. "You are fortunate enough to be the son of the greatest sorcerer in the Nine Realms *and* he was teaching you magic. I wish he was teaching me. It was one of the reasons I came out here."

"He's not teaching me anymore," Harry says quietly. Draco sighs.

"Sorry, Potter."

“I miss him,” Harry’s voice is small and sad and Tony hates that his son can sound that way. Tony leans forwards and squeezes Harry’s shoulder gently.

“I know, kid,” he says. “We’ll work something out.”

Harry shoots him a small smile that warms Tony from the insides and he immediately resolves to tracking Loki down. He may be angry with the conniving bastard and he may be hurt by everything from his relationship with *Lucas* to the invasion to *Tom* to hiding their son from him, but Harry needs his *Móðir* - that much is clear.

## **Chapter 15: On Missing Sons and Deceased Brothers**

Currently they are sitting in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place, huddled around one end of the long table over chipped china cups of tea that Kreacher had (begrudgingly) served them. The locket sits on the table between them, an elephant in the room, as Lucius and Severus between them explain what they are doing at Dumbledore’s behest. After their almost violent initial meeting with Sirius Black and a quick fire call to Dumbledore, who had amended their vows to allow them to explain the situation, they had agreed to sit down like civilised adults - hence the tea. Black finishes his cup and waves away their explanations with little interest. Severus frowns in annoyance.

“What, Black? Would you rather your delightful cousin did manage to resurrect the Dark Lord after all?” He sneers, setting down his tea cup with a clatter against the faded saucer he had been given. Next to his, the cup and saucer before Lucius looks pristine in comparison. He huffs inwardly at the prejudice of the Black family house elf.

“I would rather my *delightful* cousin was back where she belonged - or six feet under,” Black snaps. “But Dumbledore will tell me nothing about my godson. Before we even get anywhere with this mess, you two will tell me *exactly* what you know about Harry.”

“You do not believe what the *Prophet* and the Ministry are saying then? That he was Kissed?” Lucius asks, leaning back in his seat and sipping from his tea calmly. Black sighs and scratches a hand through his hair.

“I don’t know what to believe. The only information I’ve had is from the *Prophet* and that *can’t* be true. Harry’s not a murderer,” he says tiredly. As much as he despises Sirius Black, Severus can understand the frustration of not being told anything. Dumbledore so frequently likes to keep secrets from all of his playing pieces that Severus himself is no stranger to being kept in the dark. But to be kept in the dark about your own *godson*... Well, Severus knows if he was in Black’s position, he would leave no stone unturned to find Draco. Severus does not answer, but looks at Lucius. His friend knows more of what happened regarding Potter than does, after all.

“The night of the final Triwizard task, the Dark Lord was resurrected. Your old friend Wormtail conducted some form of ritual to ensure the Dark Lord had a physical form once more. Some of us were summoned to him. He had Potter there with him; he tortured him and then duelled him, determined that he should kill the boy himself,” Lucius says carefully. Black seems to be growing more and more angry, but Severus knows the next part of the tale will stop the man in his tracks. Severus still finds it hard to believe and he has seen the memory of the night in question.

“The duel was interrupted,” Lucius continues. “By one of the Aesir. Loki of Asgard claimed the boy was his son and then gutted Voldemort like an animal. That is all I saw that night.”

“An Aesir. Loki,” Black says incredulously. “And Harry is his son?!”

“That is what he said.”

Black is shaking his head vehemently.

“No. No, its not possible. James and Lily are Harry’s parents. I’m Harry’s godfather. I would know - I would know!”

“I have a pensieve memory you can observe if you wish,” Lucius offers. “But that is what I saw and all I know is that around the time the Ministry announced the boy’s death, there was a significant amount of unrest at the Ministry.”

“What do you mean?” Black demanded. “What kind of unrest?”

Severus sighs and resists the urge to roll his eyes. *Merlin save him from Gryffindor idiots.*

“If Loki is indeed the boy’s father, he would not allow him to be incarcerated and killed after rescuing him from the Dark Lord. We do not believe Potter is dead, Black.”

“We need to find him!” Black says immediately, just like Severus knew he would. He rubs at his temples in exasperation. Any amount of time with Sirius Black has always induced a headache in the past; it is no different now.

“What we need to do is stop the Dark Lord from returning,” Severus snaps. “Wherever Potter is, he is likely safe. The Dark Lord is a greater priority.”

“For you, perhaps, snivelling cowardly Death Eater that you are, but Harry is *my* priority,” Black jeers. Severus’ hand is on his wand and he is about to leap to his feet, but Lucius’ touch on his arm stills him.

“Gentleman, please,” he says calmly. “Bellatrix is searching for a way to resurrect the Dark Lord and she is not far behind us. Whoever helped her to escape Azkaban is likely still helping her now. If we delay much longer she will succeed and then we will all be in danger - Potter most of all. Black - *Sirius*, I swear I will help you search for your godson once this is over, but for now we need your assistance.”

Lucius’ honeyed tone does the trick and Black slumps back into his chair with a frustrated sigh and a weary nod of agreement. They turn their attention to the locket then and Severus allows Lucius to continue with the explanation of how they found it and how it isn’t the real horcrux. He pulls the note from the inside and hands it to Black silently. Black reads it aloud and his voice grows shakier as he does so.

““To the Dark Lord, I know I will be dead long before you read this but I want you to know that it was I who discovered your secret. I have stolen the real horcrux and intend to destroy it as soon as I can. I face death in the hope that when you meet your match you will be mortal once more. R. A. B.’ Oh *Merlin*, Regulus, you *idiot*.”

Black's hands clench on the note and it crumples at the edges, the worn paper tearing slightly. Black stares at the note for a little while longer, before looking up at Lucius and Severus again.

"You think I might know where he's hidden it?" He surmises. "And once we find it and destroy it, Voldemort will be gone for good?"

Severus grimaces.

"Dumbledore thinks the Dark Lord has seven horcruxes. Three have been destroyed so far. This would be the fourth," he offers.

"Seven. Voldemort made *seven* horcruxes. Bloody fucking *hell*."

"Quite," Lucius drawls, dark amusement in his tone. "So you can see precisely why it is important that we deal with this before Bellatrix catches up with us."

Sirius opens his mouth to respond, but they are interrupted when a house elf - *not* Kreacher - suddenly appears in the room. Severus thinks she might be one of the Malfoy house elves.

"Flipsy is sorry, sirs, but Mistress is demanding Master's presence at Hogwarts. She is saying Master must be going there at once. The Young Master is being diaspeared."

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*"Excuse me, because I really don't think I heard you right just then. Did you just say your brother?!"*

*"Aye, Stark. Your alien partner is indeed my brother. I recognise his voice and young Harry just confirmed it for me."*

*"Your brother. The insane megalomaniac with a horn fixation? Your supposedly-dead brother? That one?"*

*"Apparently he is not as dead as he would have led us to believe. When he returns - and I am sure he will - I will have words with him."*

*"No kidding, big guy. I might have some for him myself. Fucking Loki!"*

*"I believe Barton would point out that is precisely what got you into this mess in the first place."*

*"Thor!"*

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Thor didn't know what he had expected when Stark had told him of the most recent goings on in the Tower. He wasn't surprised that Stark had fathered a child - the Midgardian news was full of tales of his promiscuity and Darcy had mentioned many times how she wasn't

sure just *how* the man didn't have ridiculous numbers of children by now. Still, whilst the fact that Stark had a son wasn't a surprise, the fact that it was also *Loki's* son had been.

As soon as he knew, he could see it. The dark hair, the green eyes, the shaping of his face. There were hints of Loki (and of Stark) in Harry's features, and no doubt once Thor spent a good amount of time with the boy, he would see it in Harry's mannerisms as well. He thinks of Harry's small, almost frail form, curled against his father on the sofa, afraid and unsure, overwrought and lost. He thinks of his other nephews and of his niece and his stomach turns. He had failed them. He had failed them and Loki in the most serious of ways, but this time he would not. Whereas before he had been unable to convince Odin otherwise, this time he would not take no for an answer. He would not submit to Odin's ruling and allow another innocent child to suffer because he was not strong enough. He defied Odin for Asgard's sake when the Aether had taken Jane as its host; why should he not do the same for his nephew?

He thinks of Sleipnir, bound to his equine form, unique as it is, and bound to service as Odin's steed for eternity. He thinks of Hela, scarred and damaged, half-dead and banished to Niflheim as just a girl, away from everything she had ever known. He thinks of Fenrir, chained by Gleipnir and hidden away. Of Jörmungandr, banished to Midgard's oceans, alone until Ragnarok. Of poor Narvi and Váli - one transformed into a wolf, only to then gore the other to death and then be slaughtered by the Einherjar. He will not fail his newest nephew - not this young half-Midgardian boy who has never seen Asgard and knows nothing of their world, who is innocent and lost even on Midgard and who has only just found his true family.

Neither will Thor allow himself to fail his brother. To this day, he does not know how Loki ever managed to forgive him his weakness on each of those separate occasions when his children were taken from him, tortured and punished. Perhaps to Loki's mind it was not Thor's fault, but Thor can only ever see his own failure when he looks back on those moments. How he was unable to stand up to their father. How he did not defy his father and help Loki squirrel his children away to another realm where they might be safe from their father's decrees. No, he will not fail Harry and he will not fail Loki.

Thor leans against the balcony railings and sighs heavily. In the far distance, he hears the rumble of thunder and knows that his thoughts are troubling him enough that it is affecting Midgard's weather patterns once more. Jane had chided him for it several times before when he was with her in London and he had promised her to try not to allow himself to do so, but sometimes it proved hard. With a little focus, he is able to clear the clouds above and the late afternoon sunlight shines down on the balcony once more. For all that is autumn, the sun warms his skin and he smiles a little, his thoughts drifting to happier days when he and Loki were not at odds and had relied upon each other as brothers should - times before Odin had announced Thor's coronation and before Loki's eyes had turned dark and full of emotions Thor could not discern.

There had been a time not long before Odin's announcement when Loki had been away. Their mother had told Thor that Loki was away to study - diplomacy and magic, Thor had thought at the time - but now he knows that Loki had come to Midgard and most likely without informing either their mother or their father. Always curious and eager to explore and learn, Thor had no doubt that Midgard's seclusion from the rest of the Nine were what had brought him there in the first place. Now he knows the reason for the length of Loki's stay - he had fallen in love. He had fallen in love with Tony Stark, one of Midgard's heroes

(though not at the time, if Thor understands what SHIELD had told him about the other Avengers correctly), and had found himself pregnant. Thor cannot guess what happened beyond that, only that Loki must have left Stark not long after discovering he was with child and that he must have left Harry with some Midgardians as protection. He knows not what has since happened to those particular Midgardians, but Harry is here now and he will have the protection of not just Thor, but the Avengers also.

The sound of footsteps behind him draw his attention and Thor turns to see Harry hovering uncertainly in the doorway. The boy is looking everywhere but at Thor and he is wringing his hands nervously.

“Um... JARVIS said you were out here and I... um... can I talk to you?” Harry asks. Thor smiles at his nephew and nods.

“You may,” he answers gently. “What is it you wish to talk about?”

Harry moves closer and sits on the bench just to the left of Thor. He looks up and Thor can see the worry in his eyes.

“My *Móðir*,” he says after a little while.

“Ah,” Thor shifts and moves to sit next to Harry on the bench, hoping he is does not come across as intimidating. “Did you have questions, or did you simply wish to talk about him?”

“You’re... you’re not going to take him away when he comes back, are you? He said that he was in prison on Asgard - that you threatened you would put him back there,” Harry says, his voice shaking and his face pale and afraid. Thor can feel his shoulder slump as he sighs heavily.

“Loki was in prison, yes. Our father - Odin - had sentenced him to spend the rest of his life in there for his crimes against Midgard and Jotunheim. I had agreed, initially-”

“What? How could you?” Harry interrupts, angry and frustrated. “It wasn’t his fault!”

Thor registers Harry’s words and eyes the boy curiously, but instead decides to finish his explanation before asking Harry what he meant. Clearly Loki has been hiding something (more than him not being dead and him having a son) and Thor will find out what it is.

“I was angry. Angry that my brother could so easily attack a world all that was all but defenceless. Angry that he would not repent. But then he helped me - partly out of need to his own revenge for our mother’s death, but he helped me protect my Jane and the Realms from the Dark Elves and apparently gave his life doing so. I had not recognised him as the brother I grew up with when I encountered him on Midgard, nor did I recognise him when we returned, but in those moments on Svartalfheim before he died, he was Loki again. I would not return him there now. He has paid his debt to me. Were the Midgardian authorities to find out of his presence here, I cannot say they would be as lenient as I,” Thor explains. Harry sits in silence for a while, staring out across the city. Thor waits patiently and eventually Harry turns to him again.

“What... what if he was forced to do it? Forced to attack New York, I mean.”

Thor stares at his nephew. There is nothing but determination and honesty in his face. He truly believes that Loki was forced to attack Midgard.

“Mr Stark... Dad, I mean, said he'd look into it when I mentioned it, but you might know something too, right? *Móðir* said that he was taken from the Void by a greater being who tortured him and used a sceptre to *remake* him. He said the Hulk restored his mind. I don't really know what it all means, or how it all works, but I thought you might understand *something* in all that.”

Thor freezes where he's sitting, but his mind is rushing as he thinks about how he didn't recognise his brother, how his brother had seemed so odd and unlike himself for the entire time he was on Midgard. How when he returned to Asgard, he was arrogant and bitter and Thor had thought him sour for failing in his attempt to conquer Midgard, but perhaps it was an act - an act to conceal the truth of it all; to hide his weakness and the horrors he had been through. To earn Odin's wrath, rather than taste his lack of love and care in the aftermath of torture and coercion. He swallows hard - that, *that* is *very* like Loki.

Thor places a gentle hand on his nephew's shoulder. He thinks of his brother, how relieved he had looked even in defeat just a scant distance from where he now sits with Harry. Thor smiles.

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“Narcissa, *please*,” Lucius says, exasperated. She will not cease her haranguing of him, ever since he arrived at Hogwarts after receiving that ill-timed message from the blasted house elf, only to discover that his son has apparently vanished on a whim from Hogwarts, telling Severus' *useless* replacement that there was a *family emergency*. The idiot had let Draco go, and now they have no idea where their son is. Predictably, Narcissa is furious and distraught all at once that her *baby* is alone and lost somewhere in the world. Privately, Lucius thinks that Narcissa is most likely underestimating their son and is making this into more of a drama than it needs to be.

By the accounts Slughorn and McGonagall had given them - some of which came from interviewing Draco's friends - Draco had apparently been growing more and more dissatisfied with Hogwarts and the education he was receiving there. One of his housemates had been particularly vocal in pointing out Draco's fury at how unfair the house system was against Slytherins and how the other houses seemed to have carte blanche to bully any member of their house.

McGonagall had said that Draco should have spoken to her about it, instead of running away, but Lucius thinks that this is perhaps all at once more complicated and subtle than that. He has a few inquiries he will make, once Narcissa has finished screeching at him in true Black fashion, and he if those fail, he is fairly confident his son is at least sensible enough to have left a note somewhere for them. Of course, he could always suggest Narcissa send their son an owl which will get to him no matter where he is, but he thinks he would rather spare Draco the inevitable howler for a little while longer.

“Do you not care about our son, Lucius? Is whatever *project* you're working on at the moment more important than ensuring Draco's safety? Is that it?” Narcissa hisses, stalking back across the room towards him.



“Of course I care about Draco’s safety. But I do think the scene you made at Hogwarts was rather unbecoming of a Malfoy or a Black,” Lucius tries. He reaches out to take her gently by the arms and soothe her, but she pushes his arms away.

“Do not touch me,” she snaps. “I do not care whether my behaviour is unbefitting or not. What I find unbefitting is how you don’t seem to care about Draco. You don’t seem the slightest bit interested in finding him. And I thought family meant everything to a Malfoy.”

Lucius stiffens at the accusation and he turns an icy glare on his wife.

“Family is the one thing I place above everything else. How *dare* you insinuate that I do not care what happens to our son!”

She sneers, her expression turning ugly as she continues to glare at him.

“And what about your precious Dark Lord? He may be gone now, but you went running when he called, like a good little house elf. Where was your family loyalty when that happened, Lucius?”

“I went to protect you both! You *know* what he would have done had I not gone. He would have come and slaughtered us all for my disloyalty! But he is gone and I am glad of it because you and Draco are safe now!” He snarls.

“Draco is *not* safe! He is missing!” Narcissa shrieks, hurling a vase at him. He ducks and it smashes against the wall behind his head. He stares at the pieces for a moment, before looking back at his wife. She is standing, feet apart and breathing hard, her eyes wide and crazed, anger and fear written across her features. Her normally impeccable hair is in disarray and as he looks at her he thinks that never has she looked more like Bellatrix and it scares him. He takes a deep breath and tries to calm himself.

“Narcissa,” he begins gently. “Darling, I *promise* you I will find Draco. I have one or two ideas as to where he might have gone and I have several contacts I can use to help me locate him. It will not take long, I promise.”

She seems to calm just a little and he takes a few steps closer to her.

“Why don't you go and lie down for a while, hm? I will go and make my inquiries and I will come and let you know once I am done, alright?” He says, slipping a little extra *charm* into his already gentle and coaxing tone. After another moment, she moves closer and collapses against him in an uncharacteristic show of weakness. He wraps his arms around her in a loose embrace.

“My baby, Lucius,” she murmurs. “He’s all alone out there in the world.”

“He will be fine, Narcissa. We will find him, I promise.”

After a couple more moments, she slips out of his arms and out of the room without another word. He distantly hears her call for a house elf to draw her a bath and relief rushes through him. He makes a start for his private den, calling a house elf to take his cloak and gloves as he does so, ordering them to make sure he is undisturbed. Once he has made his inquiries

about Draco's whereabouts, a call to Grimmauld Place would be in order, to make sure that Severus and Sirius haven't killed on another, but also to see if there has been any progress on the matter of the locket. No doubt Severus would also be keen to hear about what his wayward godson has gotten himself into. With a quick flick of his wand, Lucius unlocks the door to his den and enters, turning to lock it behind himself. A fire is burning in the grate and Lucius idly thinks how odd it is that the house elves have been so proactive for once. When he turns back to the room, his eyes are immediately drawn to the shrine in the corner and he inclines his head towards it nervously.

"You mortals are odd," a voice comments, amusement laced through each word. Lucius whirls immediately, drawing his wand as his heart pounds in his chest. He swallows hard at what he sees. There, in one of the wingback chairs by the fire, glass of whiskey in hand, is someone he never thought he would see again. He lowers his wand and drops to his knees head bowing.

"My lord," he murmurs.

"Whilst I appreciate the deference, that you would compare me with that *pathetic* Dark Lord of yours is offensive," Loki responds with a sneer. Lucius risks a glance and sees Loki watching him, one dark eyebrow raised.

"You can get up off the floor, you know. I will not dispose of you should you decide you wish to stand or sit rather than kneel," Loki continues. Lucius rises slowly and returns his wand to where it lives in the top of his cane. Nervous, Lucius moves to take the chair opposite Loki, not quite able to relax into it how he normally would if he were alone or with Severus. Across from him, Loki flicks his fingers and a glass of alcohol appears on the table next to Lucius' chair. Lucius only just refrains from inhaling sharply at the casual display of a magic so much greater than his own.

"Drink," Loki suggests, taking a sip from his own glass. When Lucius hesitates, he rolls his eyes and huffs a little. "It is only whiskey from your own collection, which is quite admirable as collections go, though I have seen better."

There is an air of wistfulness to Loki as he speaks, but Lucius dares not ask what the god is remembering. Instead, he drinks as instructed and is greeted by the familiar, untainted flavour of one of his rarer whiskeys. It is not one he would usually serve to guests, but given *who* his guest is, he won't argue.

"I am most humbled by your visit, your highness," Lucius attempts after another sip at his drinks.

"Humbled? Hm," Loki breathes a small laugh. "Yes, the great Lucius Malfoy, humbled. What a sight that would be. Though I suppose your lovely wife did attempt that just now. Narcissa, is it?"

"Yes," Lucius answers carefully. "Might I inquire as to the reason for your visit, your highness?"

Loki takes a larger sip from his drink and studies the colour of it in the glass for a moment, before lowering it and looking Lucius in the eyes. Lucius resists the urge to squirm and holds Loki's gaze for a few moments before he is unable to do so any longer.

"You were there that night, were you not?" Loki asks. Lucius swallows hard and opens his mouth to speak but Loki interrupts him.

"Do not even think about asking *which* night when you know perfectly well the night in question."

"I was," Lucius answers plainly, feeling more than a little chastised.

"Lying to me is futile, Lucius. You do recall my various monikers, do you not? If you lie, I will know it."

Lucius has not felt this small in years - not since his father was still alive and in charge of the Malfoy family holdings. He takes another drink to hide his discomfort.

"You were there that night, so you know of whom I speak when I mention my son, correct?" Loki continues.

"Harry Potter," Lucius supplies. Loki nods, a small smile on his lips.

"Yes, though Hávarðr Anthony Lokijarson would be more correct. That is his real name. Do you know what happened to him after that night?"

Lucius shifts uncomfortably in his chair, cautious of mentioning what the Wizarding World had done to Harry Potter. He does not think Loki would be unaware himself, or even that Loki does not know where Potter is now, but he would rather not end up like the Dark Lord had.

"The Ministry of Magic in its *infinite* wisdom, decided to detain him as they believed he had killed another student. A short while later they announced he had been sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss and had subsequently died," Lucius answers, sneering at the thought of the Ministry's incompetence. Loki laughs and Lucius finds himself able to breathe a little easier.

"Do you believe him dead, Lucius?"

"I believe you would not have abandoned him in such a way, your highness," Lucius says smoothly.

"Your belief serves you well. My son is alive and well and he is currently with his father," Loki explains. Lucius hopes he covers his surprise at Loki's words, but he is unsure that the god before him would miss even the slightest tic in his facial expressions.

"I am glad," he acknowledges.

"Are you? Because I seem to remember that you serving that monstrosity that tried to kill my Hávarðr in that graveyard," Loki says coolly. Lucius looks away and tries to respond but Loki continues over him.

“Do you know where *your* son is, Lucius?”

Fear flickers inside Lucius and he wonders if this is the day he is finally punished for the mistakes of his youth. Draco has been taken away by the gods for Lucius’ own errors and mistakes and the grave insult of serving the wizard who attempted to take the life of Loki’s son and this is worse than anything he ever could have imagined for the punishments of the gods are cruel and creative and -

“Relax, Lucius,” Loki murmurs. “Have another drink.”

A flick of long, dextrous fingers and the level of liquid in Lucius’ glass increases. Shakily, Lucius lifts his drink to his lips and downs it all in one go, hating himself for losing his cool and collected appearance.

“You know where my son is?” He asks hoarsely - begs, really. Loki laughs, amused and pleased with the state of Lucius. Lucius feels as though he is being toyed with; he is predator turned prey to someone greater than himself and it is a wholly unwelcome experience. It reminds him of the Dark Lord - though much less physical torture is involved.

“Your son is amusing,” Loki comments. “Not long after I took Hávarðr and we settled in New York City, your son wrote to mine. He did not believe his so-called archenemy was dead, apparently and wanted to tell my Hávarðr how ridiculous it all was. He also wanted to know if it was true that Hávarðr was my son. I can only assume he found that out from you, somehow. They struck up a strange correspondence following that first letter, and that has sustained Hávarðr somewhat through this strange transition he has been going through. I am grateful to your son for that, make no mistake. But he did arrive unexpectedly at our home just few days ago. He had come to visit, I believe, and to offer his assistance in a matter most pressing. Be assured, your son is fine. He is with Hávarðr and his father.”

Lucius calms somewhat when he hears that Draco is alright. He does not know what he will tell Narcissa, but it is a relief to know that Draco is safe - even if he is with Harry Potter of all people.

“Draco is in New York?” He clarifies.

“Indeed. In Stark Tower in Manhattan, to be more precise,” Loki offers. Lucius feels his nose wrinkle in distaste.

“Stark? That awful muggle businessman?” He sneers, unable to help himself. He regrets it immediately when Loki’s pleasant, neutral expression vanishes and is instantly replaced by something dark and threatening.

“You think yourself above him? You think yourself above those who cannot use magic? Magic is a gift, Lucius Malfoy; you should treasure it and not lord it over others or you will reap the same consequences as your precious Dark Lord,” Loki hisses.

“Forgive me, your highness, I will not - I will no longer - I won’t-”

“Save your snivelling,” Loki says darkly. “For your information and so you won’t make the same error in the future, Stark just so happens to be Hávarðr’s father. *That* is why they are in one of the most secure buildings in New York. Be grateful your son is not on the streets.”

Lucius nods meekly, not trusting himself to speak. Harry Potter’s parents are Loki and Stark? The boy who caused the Dark Lord so much trouble is the child of a god and a muggle? In his mind, Lucius laugh hysterically, wondering how on earth he is going to tell Severus this.

“But all this is besides the point. You asked at the beginning of our conversation why I am here. I am here, Lucius, because your Dark Lord did something to my son. Something that needs dealing with and I need to understand your Midgardian magic in order to do so. Your son brought me books from your library, which I have glanced through, hoping for a solution,” Loki says, draining the last of his drink. He leans forwards in his seat, arms resting on his knees.

“Did you find a solution?”

“If I had, I would not be here,” Loki replies. “I have isolated what I believe your Dark Lord did and the books have given a solution, but it will not do.”

Lucius is almost afraid to ask, but he does so anyway.

“What did the Dark Lord do to your son?”

“He turned my son into a horcrux.”

## **Chapter 16: On Magic and Science**

Bellatrix drags the half-conscious goblin behind her, paying its moans and whimpers little mind as she strides down the passageway and into the cavern. As the space opens out before her, fury burns in her veins once more at what she sees. A mountain of burned Inferi are between her and the stone basin where her lord had placed the horcrux and that alone tells her that someone has been here before her - no doubt that same person who stole the cup from her vault. She levitates the goblin into the wooden boat with a flick of her wand, climbing in after it and the boat takes them to the island in the centre of underground lake. It takes very little time to confirm what she already knew - the basin is empty; the poison and locket gone.

With a screech of rage she turns on the goblin, viciously casting *crucio* and watching as it writhes in pain yet again. It does little to soothe her anger however, so she tries numerous spells, each one increasingly cruel, before finally killing it with a well-practised *Avada Kedavra*. The rage still burns in her veins as she kicks the goblin’s lifeless form out of the boat. Someone is playing games with her. Someone has clearly learned of her lord’s contingency plan and is doing everything in their power to stop her lord returning to rule the Wizarding World in power and glory.

She does not know who it could be - her lord had told no one but her; had trusted only her with the details of his horcruxes; whispered to her in the dead of night whilst he had tortured her most beautifully. She had never forgotten a single detail. His gentle, smooth voice, murmuring in her ear as her body contorted, wracked in delicious, exquisite pain. The

promise she had breathed to protect his secrets - his immortality - with her life and to resurrect him with the ritual he had provided. His smile - his wicked, proud smile - as he accepted her fealty over and over and over again. Her brutish, idiotic husband's face as she exited her lord's rooms the following morning - the scowl he wore! She cackles to remember it, before her fury returns in full once more.

She exits the cave in a flurry of motion, ready to apparate away, back to the safe house her sister has furnished her with when something catches her eye. She kneels by the cave wall, near the entrance to the cavern, her eyes travelling across the stains on the rock. Her own blood-price glistens in the light from the tip of her wand, wet still. A quick *evanesco* removes it and she is left staring at a blood stain - no doubt from whomever had taken the locket. What *luck*.

She smiles.

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Thor isn't quite sure how this conversation will proceed. Stark is possibly the one member of the Avengers that remains a mystery to him. It has been a week since Thor revealed to Stark that Loki was Harry's mother, and in that week Stark has seemingly avoided him at all costs. Thor has seen the man with his son, of course - Stark is taking his newfound fatherhood seriously, at least, and is doing his best to not blame the son for Loki's misdeeds. Thor is heartened by Stark's efforts and he cannot help but smile every time he sees his nephew together with Stark. He hopes it may long continue and that such dark things as befell Loki's other children will not visit Harry and Stark. He does not know how Loki has managed to conceal Harry thus far, but whatever it is, it is working. Thor only fears that all this recent commotion may draw Heimdall's gaze. Perhaps if he is not overly familiar with Harry, Heimdall will not come to understand that Harry is Thor's nephew and therefore Loki's son. Perhaps it will only look as though Harry is Stark's son and nothing more.

Somehow, Thor doubts his ability to keep his distance from Harry. He thinks this is likely one of the (no doubt many) reasons why Loki left.

Still, he must talk with Stark, especially given the news his nephew had imparted just the other day. He has spent some time thinking it over - the revelation that Loki was forced to invade Midgard - but he has only more questions and not many answers. He thinks if he talks with Stark, perhaps they may be able to find the answers together, but he is uncertain how far they will get without Loki here to explain it all himself.

The elevator comes to a halt on the floor that houses Stark's workshop and Thor exits quickly, eager to talk to his shield brother. He has no illusions that this will be an easy conversation; Stark will try to evade him with words as much as he has done physically in the last week, but it is a conversation that must happen. A brief knock on the glass door is it all it takes to capture the other man's attention and Thor watches him wince before nodding resignedly and the door slides open. Thor enters the room cautiously, glancing around with appreciation as always for his friend's advanced mind and skills. It may be science far behind Asgard's own, but it is science nonetheless and it is science far beyond the rest of Midgard. He has no doubt as to why Loki fell for this man. They are well suited, he thinks, shaking his head with a sad smile. He wishes he could have seen them together.

“Hey, Thoreal,” Stark begins with a pained smile, setting aside his tools. “What can I do for you?”

Thor comes to a halt the other side of Stark’s workbench and wonders how to begin this conversation. He thinks perhaps if he can coax the man into it, it will be less painful and less likely to end without any real progress. Not for the first time, he wishes he had his brother’s skill with words.

“I was wondering how you were faring, Stark, now that you have a child,” Thor tries. Stark freezes momentarily, and he seems confused that Thor didn’t just immediately leap in with *Loki*, but after a moment he relaxes and reaches for his coffee mug.

“Weird, really, weird, Thor,” Stark admits, taking a swig of his drink. “Ugh, cold. I *hate* cold coffee.”

“I had the impression that this was something you were used to,” Thor continues, seating himself on a nearby stool. “Darcy told me of your exploits. One would think you would have several children by now, Stark.”

Stark, over by the coffee machine, lets out a short, harsh laugh.

“You and the entire world,” he answers. “But condoms are a gift to mankind. The world didn’t need more Starks running around.”

“And yet there is one,” Thor points out, watching as Stark pours the freshly brewed coffee into two mugs and moves to hold one out. Thor accepts it and inhales the pleasant smell.

“Well, I didn’t think I would have a kid with a man. You know that’s not possible here, right? It’s not something we humans do?” Stark points out, gesturing with his steaming mug. Thor nods.

“Yes. I did tell you it was something we Aesir do not have the ability to do either. My brother is... unique.”

Stark laughs harshly.

“That’s one way of putting it.”

Thor winces and wishes he had more tact. He wishes he knew how to talk to this skittish, evasive man in such a way that would get him to listen and to understand.

“You do not hold Loki’s crimes against Harry, I have noticed,” Thor tries.

“Harry’s a kid. None of what Loki did is his fault - the kid didn’t even know he was related to either one of us back then. How can I blame him for that? Besides, I’ve been blamed for my father’s shortcomings. I know what it’s like and I couldn’t do that to my own kid.”

“Young Harry mentioned something to me the other day - I am not sure if he has told you yet, but it is that which I wished to speak to you about,” Thor sips at his coffee and finds it cool

enough to drink. He hopes that he has broken the ice sufficiently that they will be able to talk properly now.

“What? The stuff about Loki being tortured? Forced to invade Earth? That what you mean?” Stark replies. Thor nods, relieved that Harry has mentioned it already. He thinks Stark would be more open to it coming from his son, rather than Loki’s overly-devoted brother. He knows they all think him entirely blinded by his love for his brother, and perhaps there is some truth to it, but he can see Loki’s faults. It is Loki’s vulnerabilities he doesn’t see.

“He’s a kid who wants to believe the best of his parents, Thor,” Stark sighs. “He’d believe anything Loki told him.”

“So you will not investigate?” Thor asks, despair and anger suddenly surging within him. Stark drains his coffee and rubs at his temple with his free hand.

“I didn’t say that. I told Harry I’d look into it and I’m not going to start my relationship with him by lying. I just... I just don’t expect to find any evidence, okay?”

Thor sits in silence for a while, thinking over what his friend is saying and what Harry had told him the other day. If he cannot find some way of convincing Stark there *is* evidence, then Stark will not look very hard. He won’t try. After a few moments, he remembers something.

“Harry said Loki was remade with the sceptre. Just like Barton and Selvig,” Thor says quietly. Stark freezes and looks directly at Thor.

“The sceptre?”

Thor nods grimly. “Apparently a greater being in the Void of space used it on him to remake him. Only the Hulk restored Loki’s mind to him.”

“Cognitive recalibration - like what Romanov did to Barton,” Stark breathes. Thor can see his mind starting to work, Stark’s eyes distant as he thinks through what Thor’s just told him. Still, whilst the mystery of it may be enough intrigue to make Stark begin looking, Thor has to make sure that he’s doing this for Harry as well - that he’s aware of what this may mean for them all.

“Thank you, Stark,” Thor begins. Stark looks up at him, confused.

“What for?”

“For helping me with this - for helping Loki. I know it must be hard, given your anger.”

Stark, who had been flicking through information on one of his holoscreens, minimises it and looks at Thor with tired, hurt eyes.

“I’m doing this for Harry,” he says quietly. “I’m still angry at Loki and that’s not going to change any time soon.”



“I know, Stark and I-”

“Do you? Do you really, Thor? Because he came here, to Earth, and *lied* to me for eighteen months. He pretended to be someone else for eighteen months, and that someone else? I *adored* Lucas. Adored him - would have done anything for him. I love - *loved* him, Thor and it was all a lie! Then he vanishes - without warning, without any kind of hint. It was completely out of the blue. I had no idea, because we were happy together. He says now its because of Harry - because all of his kids are hunted and killed and that he left to protect Harry and to protect me, but I just don’t know, okay? Theoretically, I know about all his other kids and what happened to them, but he *lied* to me for so long and I don’t know what to believe,” Stark pauses, running a hand through his hair and making it stand up on end.

“And don’t forget the invasion. He *may* have been mind controlled, but he still did it and I still have nightmares about what could have happened. And now he comes back to earth, even though he’s supposedly dead, and poses as another man just to have sex with me? At what point has there ever been honesty between me and him, Thor? At what point was he ever truly *honest* with me? I’m shit at relationships, but even I know that you can’t build one on lies and that’s all that’s left between me and Lucas - Tom - Loki - whoever he chooses to be. Its just lies.”

Thor watches as Stark’s shoulders slump and the man suddenly seems smaller than ever. His presence normally fills a room, despite his smaller stature. He is the loudest, most brash and confident of the Avengers, yet now he seems defeated and small and Thor doesn’t ever want to see his friend like this again.

“Not long before our father announced my coronation, Loki vanished for a while. Mother said he went travelling to study. He was gone an unusually long amount of time and I can only assume now that he was here - on Midgard, when it was forbidden for Aesir to travel here and interfere with mortal lives. When he eventually returned, I had never in all our centuries seen him so heartbroken and dejected. He refused to tell me anything, of course, but it was clear he was grieving something. You, Stark. And Harry,” Thor says gently. Stark shakes his head in denial and turns away from Thor.

“No, no. He wasn’t. He can’t have.”

“Yes, Stark. He grieved for you and Harry and he never really recovered. He may have lied about his identity, but he never lied about his feelings. This I am sure of.”

There is silence in the lab and Thor waits to see if Stark will respond at all, but the other man just brings up the screen he had been looking at earlier and begins to work again. When he rises to leave, Stark speaks once more.

“If we’re going to figure this out, I’m going to have to tell the Avengers who Harry’s mom is, aren’t I? Jesus, Barton’s gonna put an arrow through *my* eye.”

Thor grins.

“I shall leave you to it, Stark,” he says cheerily, leaving the lab. “And I shall tell the others you have an announcement to make at dinner!”

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Harry sits in the centre of his bed, staring around the destruction and frowning. In the last week, he has accidentally destroyed his room three times and now he is doing it again. His chest heaves with effort as he closes his eyes tightly and tries to regain some kind of control. He tries to remember everything that his *Móðir* had told him about meditation, but his emotions are all over the place and he isn't sure how to stop it. Somewhere in his room, something else explodes and he hears a muffled swear word coming from where Draco had been taking shelter.

"Sorry!" He cries out, even as he tries to wrestle back some kind of control. He can feel his magic moving underneath his skin; a burning sensation snaking its way up and down his arms, trying to find some way out. He is shaking now, and when he opens his eyes again, his hands are glowing green, sparks stuttering out and dissipating into the charged atmosphere of his room.

They had already tried asking JARVIS to get someone, but it appears Harry's magic has interfered and stopped JARVIS from hearing. Draco had tried leaving the room to find someone himself, but the door was tightly shut and wouldn't open.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," Harry mutters, trying vainly to still the shaking of his arms and to calm his breathing. He had thought he had been making progress with his lessons. He had thought that he had his magic under control. His *Móðir* had started to teach him some spells, and he practised his meditation every day, so *why is this happening?*

Harry thinks a window smashes; the air in the room is suddenly cooler and he hears Draco swearing once more. He squeezes his eyes shut, even as there is a pounding on his bedroom door and the sound of the door handle being turned frantically.

"Harry? Harry! Let us in!" Someone is shouting. Harry thinks it might be Steve, but he is unsure. He hears Draco use an *aguamenti* again and wonders what else he's set on fire; the scent of something burning fills his nostrils.

"Harry!" Steve shouts again, sounding more desperate.

"The door's locked magically; I can't open it!" Draco shouts back. "Get his father, for Merlin's sake!"

Harry's trembling worsens at the mention of his father.

"NO! Don't! I can't protect him from this - from me!" He protests, opening his eyes to stare at Draco pleadingly. Draco dashes across the room from the door and moves to take Harry gently by the wrist. He hisses a little in pain when he does so and Harry tries to pull away but Draco won't let him.

"No, Potter, look at me," Draco snaps. "Look at me and focus. Just focus, okay?"

"Focus? I can't focus - look what's happening!" Harry says hysterically. "I need *Móðir*. *Móðir* can stop this."

“No, you don’t need Loki. You can do this yourself. Isn’t that the point of all your meditation?”

“B-but I’m trying. I’m trying and I c-can’t!”

“You. can.”

“But *how*?”

He watches as Draco grasps for an answer - any answer and after a few moments, Draco breathes deeply.

“A snitch. Think of a snitch. You can focus on that, right? Just think about chasing after it on the Quidditch pitch. How your world narrows to nothing but the snitch. Try that. Try focusing on that, okay?”

Draco’s idea catches Harry off guard, but something else is exploding and something else is catching on fire, so he closes his eyes, squeezing them shut as tight as he can and tries to think of being on his broom, of flying over the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch, of the roar of cheers and the feel of the wind on his skin. Of spotting the tiniest golden glimmer of the snitch, of waiting to be certain he’d really seen it and then hurtling after it as fast as he could, weaving in and out, his gaze narrowed to nothing but the elusive snitch, arm outstretched and then finally the smooth metal hitting his palm and his fingers closing around it, crumpling soft, feathered wings. He breathes.

The sound of the door splintering beneath some heavy weight makes him open his eyes and he looks over to see Steve and his father almost falling into the room as the door finally gives way beneath Steve’s strength. Draco is still sat in front of him, one hand closed around his wrist. He gives Harry a relieved smile before gently and carefully letting go. He tries to hide his palm as he pulls away, but Harry can see the red, burned state of it and he recoils in horror at what he’s done to his friend, but he has not time to apologise, because his father is suddenly there, arms wrapping around Harry with no thought to his own safety.

“Jesus, kid, are you alright?” Tony breathes, fear in his tone and his actions. He pulls back to look at Harry’s face, eyes scanning worriedly. “What happened?”

“My magic. Again,” Harry whispered, looking away dejectedly. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to, I couldn’t help it. Please, I’ll fix it, I swear-”

“Hey, slow down, slow down,” his father says gently. “Just breathe, okay? Its fine.”

“But this is the fourth time and I-”

Tony shushes him and just pulls him close.

“Cap, you wanna take Cassiopeia over there and get that hand looked at?” He suggests. Harry watches Draco open his mouth indignantly to protest the nicknames for the nth time this week, but Steve ushers him out of the room before he can do so. Harry’s father snickers as they leave.

“He makes it too easy,” Tony comments. Harry doesn’t reply, instead staring down at his hands dejectedly.

“I thought I had it under control,” he murmurs. He feels as though his magic is betraying him; as though he is a child again with no control over his body and his mind whatsoever. His father shifts them so he is sitting against the headboard, with Harry snuggling into his side. It is a position they have taken several times in the last week and one that Harry finds comforting in the absence of his *Móðir*.

“We all think we’ve got things under control and then something crazy happens just to prove us wrong,” Tony says, the weight of experience behind his words. Harry watches him rub at his chest for a moment, but it doesn’t last long. “You want to tell me about it? About your magic? Because that’s the problem, right? Your magic.”

Harry shrugs.

“You said before you used to do this when you were a kid,” Tony prods, trying to coax Harry into speaking.

“Yeah,” Harry sighs. “Then I went to Hogwarts and got a wand. That’s how the Wizarding World does magic - with wands. But then when *Móðir* - Loki rescued me, I lost my wand. He said I didn’t need it; that we did magic without wands and that mortal wizards only used it because they couldn’t use magic effectively without a conduit. So he’s been teaching me to control my magic and to do spells without a wand but since he left...”

Harry hunches in on himself even as his father’s arm tightens around him.

“I miss him,” Harry says quietly. “He would know what to do.”

There is an awkward silence for a while and Harry worries that he’s said too much and that he’s angered his father, but Tony doesn’t look angry. He just looks resigned and sad.

“So. Thor and I, we’re gonna work on a way to prove Loki’s innocence. Then hopefully he can come back and see you again,” Tony says eventually. “But in the mean time, I need to talk science, because all this talk of magic is giving me hives. Please, *please* tell me you know something about science!”

Harry laughs a little at his father.

“But Uncle Thor said that our magic is just science humans can’t understand yet,” he says, trying not to laugh as his father looks offended.

“Um, no. No, that is not science. It breaks all the laws of science,” he protests. “I mean real science, Harry, come on!”

“I went to a magic school for four years; they don’t teach science,” Harry points out. Tony looks at him despairingly.

“We have a lot of work to do,” he says, shaking his head. Harry takes pity on his father for a moment.

“But I have been going Midtown High School since September - that’s where I met Peter - and the sciences are my best subjects.”

Tony does a fist pump and grins down at him.

“Of course they are, you’re a Stark.”

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Tony doesn’t make the announcement at dinner, but later, once Harry and Draco have gone to bed and the Avengers are alone in the common area they share one floor down from Tony’s. They all look at him expectantly and he just sips from his whiskey, trying to gain some kind of fortification against what’s about to happen. He has no idea how to go about this. Just blurting it out isn’t going to work, but there is really no diplomatic way of saying *‘you know that guy who tried to take over the world? The one who killed Agent? Yeah... he’s my baby mama. And I may have been sleeping with him recently too. Except, you know, I didn’t know it was him. Either time.’*

He brings up a holoscreen and spends some time searching for the information manually, rather than just having JARVIS do it, and he can see the rest of them getting irritated at the time wasting. “Just spit it out, Stark,” Natasha sighs. Tony brings up the images of ‘Tom’ and ‘Lucas’. The others straighten in their seats.

“So, you all know about the whole slept with an alien and had a kid thing, and that Tom and Lucas are the same person, right?” He says awkwardly. Thor nods at him encouragingly while the others nod their heads and roll their eyes in exasperation.

“Thor tell you where he’s from?” Bruce asks, leaning forwards in his seat.

“Kind of... um... Thor recognised him - well, recognised his voice and understood the language,” Tony answers, jamming his hands into his back pockets to keep himself from nervously fidgeting.

“So what was he saying? Creepy things about how he was going to kill you? Is he some serial killer kind of alien?” Clint suggests. Bruce glares at him.

“Come on, Clint, given what we know of Tony’s relationship with Lucas, I really don’t think its that. And you heard the guy when he was here - he still loves Tony,” he points out. Clint shrugs.

“Still creepy, man.”

“Banner is right,” Thor interjects. “The words he uttered were words of love and of their son. I suspect he thought it was the only way he could tell Stark about Harry without being discovered.”

Tony didn’t know that. He didn’t know what had been said, because he’d never asked Thor for a translation in the end. He’d been too angry at the thought that it was *Loki* to even *think* to ask what had been said in those moments. Even now he isn’t sure if he wants to know what Loki said. He isn’t sure he wants to open himself up to that pain.

“So if you recognised him, who is he?” Steve asks Thor. “And is he a danger?”

Tony laughs weakly at Steve’s question.

“Is he a danger,” he echoes, laughing. “Its probably not funny, right, Thor?”

“My friend, if I could say anything that would assure you he is not a danger, I would, but I’m afraid his actions speak louder than my words, even if he was coerced,” Thor says quietly. The others look at Tony strangely and with no small amount of worry in their eyes.

“He’s dangerous?” Steve clarifies.

“You might say that,” Tony sighs heavily. “J, bring it up, would you?”

Tony doesn’t look at the screen, but he knows that right between the pictures of Lucas and Tom a third picture is appearing - one of someone they are all familiar with. He hears the sharp intake of breath and risks a glance around the table. Thor already knew, so he just looks sympathetic, but the others are a different story. Bruce is perhaps the one who has reacted the least - he’s just eying the pictures thoughtfully before looking directly at Tony. Tony avoids his gaze and instead looks at the others. Steve is frowning, but Tony already knows the man is coming up with contingencies - *he is the Star Spangled Man with a Plan after all* - and ways of making sure this doesn’t get worse. Natasha’s face is as imperceptible as always, a single raised eyebrow pointed in Tony’s direction. But Clint? Clint’s face has drained of all colour; his eyes wide and fearful for a moment before anger swoops in and takes over. He stands slowly.

“Loki? You slept with Loki?” He says lowly. Tony drops his gaze, unable to look at Clint.

“I didn’t know it was him,” he replies quietly.

“*Jesus*, Tony!” Steve snaps. “How did you not know? Look at the pictures - look how little difference there is between all of them!”

Tony looks at winces when he sees what Steve is saying. Loki’s ‘Tom’ and ‘Lucas’ disguises aren’t really that different from his true form. He slumps down into the nearest seat and puts his head in his hands.

“Hey, don’t take it out on Tony,” Bruce cuts in. “How was he supposed to know with Lucas? He met the guy in the nineties, before we even knew Loki existed! And we all thought Loki was dead, so of course he wasn’t going to think Tom was Loki - he was always going to think that Tom looked liked Lucas!”

“And you didn’t think Loki looked like your old fuck buddy when he invaded?” Clint shouts. Tony’s head snaps up and he glares at Clint.

“Shut the fuck up, Barton. You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he hisses.

“Don’t know what I’m talking about? Excuse me, of all of us here in this room, who has had Loki in their head? Huh? You? No, you got a free ride out of that one, didn’t you?”

“I may not have had him in my head, but I have still been manipulated by the asshole, so don’t think I’ve come out of this unscathed, Barton. So shut the hell up,” Tony shouts. He is ready to launch himself across the coffee table at one more inflammatory comment from Clint, but Thor’s hand on his arm stops him and the anger drains out of him to be replaced by exhaustion.

“Whatever. I slept with Loki. I didn’t know it was him. We have a kid. End of story,” he says tiredly. “If you need me, *don’t* call. I’ll be too busy picking up the shit he left behind upstairs and looking after my son.

## **Chapter 17: On Vows and Rituals**

Standing in the dim light outside a row of old-looking houses, Loki accepts the slip of parchment from Lucius with no small amount of amusement. He dutifully reads it as instructed and wonders why these magic users believe he would have trouble finding one of their locations. From what he has seen so far, their concealment spells are weak and have far too many holes in that could be exploited, and this particular spell is no different. Even before he had been handed the parchment, he could tell there was a house hidden just from the feel of the atmosphere in the street - the lingering taste of magic in the air. It would have taken him little effort to extract it from its concealment and then even less effort to enter it. Still, he humours the nervous wizard next to him and destroys the parchment with a twist of his fingers once he is done. True enough, he can see the house now, but he remains unimpressed. It looks older than the others; the front garden overgrown with weeds and the porch dilapidated and unwelcoming. He can feel his nose wrinkle in disgust as he surveys it before following Lucius up the path and in through the door.

The inside is no better than the outside, with the addition of the sound of a woman’s hideous screeching. She is shouting at her son - this much he gleans from the few sentences he can distinguish - irate at his betrayal of the family values and principles. He feels a mild bit of sympathy for the son, knowing the burden of disappointed parents intimately, but as the shrieking continues, he tires of it quickly. Ignoring Lucius’ directions to another room, Loki follows the sound to an ugly portrait hanging from a wall just up the stairs. Curtains hang around the frame and he wonders what their purpose is for a brief moment before turning his attention to the woman in the painting. She is haggard and aged, with a nose too big for her face and eyes small and mean. A rather hairy wart sprouts from one cheek. Her shouting does not improve her appearance. She halts mid-sentence when she notices him, eyes narrowed and suspicious.

“Who are you? What are you doing in *my* house?” She demands snootily. She looks at him as though he is dirt beneath the sole of her shoe and he lifts an eyebrow in cold disbelief.

“And I thought wizardkind revered the gods,” he says snidely. “My name, madam, is Loki of Asgard and your shrieking is bothering me.”

The expected fear is there only very briefly before she turns indignant at his words and starts to shout once more. His patience worn thin, he weaves a strong silencing spell and layers it into the painting’s canvas. She shouts ineffectually for a little while longer before realising what he’s done. Her face contorts in silent rage and he just grins in satisfaction. Without another word, he turns away from the portrait and returns to where he’d left Lucius. The wizard stares at him.

“No one has ever managed to silence her before,” he comments. Loki rolls his eyes.

“You must remember, Lucius, that I am not like you mortal wizards. Now, shall we?”

Lucius nods, eying Loki warily, before leading him through the hallway and into what seems to be a kitchen. At one end of the long dining table in the centre of the room is a fireplace, blazing with heat. A dour-faced man in black robes with a scowl to match sits in an armchair next to it, flicking through a text on his knee.

“Severus,” Lucius greets the man. “Where is Black?”

The man looks up, his scowl deepening. Loki assumes the aforementioned ‘Black’ has something to do with the expression on the man’s face.

“Somewhere upstairs, no doubt arguing with his insane mother,” the man comments. “Or he was. Given that the shouting has ceased I expect he drew the curtains.”

“Ah, no,” Lucius replies. “That would be his highness’ doing.”

Severus’ eyes shift to land on Loki and the man seems to study him for a moment before grimacing, closing his book and standing up. He extends a hand in Loki’s direction and Loki eyes it cautiously.

“Severus Snape,” the man introduces himself.

Ah. So *this* is Professor Snape. Loki smirks and takes hold of the man’s hand firmly.

“I had wondered when I might have the dubious privilege of meeting the infamous Professor Snape,” he says snidely. He has heard much from Hávarðr of this man and his teaching methods. Snape’s eyes narrow as he observes Loki.

“And who might you be?” He demands, voice cold. Loki goes to respond, but Lucius jumps in, clearly trying to prevent his friend from making any further faux pas.

“Severus, this is Prince Loki of Asgard. He has a request to make of us,” Lucius explains, staring sternly at his friend, clearly willing him to shut up and not offend the god in their midst. Loki stifles his amusement at Lucius’ antics. The man is very amusing.

“Is he now?” Severus responds, disbelieving.

“Severus, you watched my memories, you *must* recognise him,” Lucius hisses.

“No matter,” Loki says airily, increasing the strength of his grip. “After all, what is the point in the gods if there are no unbelievers? But know this, *Professor* Snape, I have heard of how you have treated my son and I am displeased.”

Severus’ irritated gaze does not waver, though there is pain in his eyes, and Loki almost admires the man for it; were he not so angry on Hávarðr’s behalf, he thinks he would like this man.



“And if you have seen Lucius’ memory of the night in the graveyard, think on that and your treatment of Hávarðr before you decide angering me further is a wise course of action,” Loki finishes, letting go of Snape’s hand. He sweeps past and seats himself in the chair Snape had stood from, watching out of the corner of his eye as the man flexes his hand discreetly, trying to restore the feeling. As he makes himself comfortable, he enjoys watching the irritation in Snape’s expression increase. He demands a cup of tea, *properly brewed* and picks up the book Snape had been reading. Conveniently, it is on horcruxes. He flicks through, not paying attention the hissed whispers between Lucius and Severus at the other end of the room, content to wait for his tea and for the final member of their little adventuring party to join them.

The book itself does not offer any startlingly new information on horcruxes, but rather seems to reiterate the information Loki has already found in the books Draco had brought him. A piece of soul attached to an object can only be removed by destroying the object in question. Basilisk venom and fiendfyre are the only two known ways of destroying a horcrux, and Loki does not want to subject Hávarðr to either. There must be a way of separating the soul fragment from the object somehow - and that must then be applicable to a person. Surely if wizardkind has come far enough to have invented this kind of dark soul magic, they have invented a way out of it? There must be some other counter for it. Of course, he could just attack the soul fragment with the full power of his magic behind him, but that would do nothing good for Hávarðr’s soul. No, this is a more intricate working, and whilst Loki knows much about magic across the realms, this kind of intricacy in wizardkind’s magic is not something he has seen fit to study before. He hopes he has time enough to discover a viable solution.

“Not that I’m not grateful, but which of you silenced the old bat upstairs?” A new voice asks, interrupting Loki’s train of thought. He glances over to the doorway where a handsome man stands, brushing down his jacket and clutching something in his fist.

“That would be his highness, Prince Loki,” Lucius answers, moving across the room and setting a tea set down on the table by the fire. He carefully pours Loki a cup and hands it over. Loki nods his thanks.

“*Prince Loki?!?*” The man almost shouts. “Where is he? I demand to know where Harry is, right now!”

“Oh?” Loki interjects, sipping at his tea. “And who are you to make such a demand of me?”

The man whirls at Loki’s words and storms over to the fireplace to glare down at him. Loki continues to sip at his tea and wonders at the man’s similarity to Thor. Certainly the rashness with which he decided to angrily confront someone much more powerful than he is is similar, at least.

“I’m Harry’s godfather! Sirius Black!” He snaps. “And since when is Harry not James and Lily’s son? They would have told me!”

“Except that I asked them not to tell anyone when I gave them my son,” Loki points out coolly. “His safety - his *life* depended on it.”

“But I was to look after him if they died! There are things I would need to know!” Black protests, cheeks colouring in anger.

“And where were you when they did die, hmm? Certainly not looking after my Hávarðr, as he was given to some ghastly relatives of Lily’s - which reminds me, I really should pay them a visit,” Loki says calmly, almost pleasantly. Black looks as though he is about to explode and Loki doesn’t have to wonder long whether Lucius will intervene again, as the man is already moving to take Black by the arm.

“Calm yourself, Black. His highness is here with a request to do with Potter,” Lucius says firmly. Black subsides a little, but his gaze darts between Lucius and Loki.

“Is he safe? Please tell me he’s alright!” He says pleadingly. Loki takes pity on the man as he clearly cares for Hávarðr, even though his attitude and his rashness are not exactly helpful.

“He is safe - for now,” Loki answers. “Though there is an issue that may cause problems if left alone. However, before we can discuss it, I have been informed that all three of you are under some kind of vow to prevent you from speaking about this particular issue to anyone other than yourselves.”

He watches as the three of them share a look and Black’s grip seems to tighten on whatever he is holding. Loki watches as he shoves it in his jacket pocket none too discreetly. None of them say anything in response and he sighs in frustration. Without saying anything else, he flicks two fingers, freezing the three wizards where they stand and then throws a single hand out in Black’s direction first, twisting his fingers and pulling them close towards him. As he does so, a golden thread appears out of Black’s chest, glowing and pulsating. Around a small section of it is a dark blue colour, constricting it and stopping the golden glow. Loki does the same with Lucius and Snape and then anchors the three golden threads with one hand, wrapping the ends around different fingers on his left hand. With his right, he reaches towards the stretch of dark blue on the first golden thread and begins to unpick it carefully - not all of the way, but just a little - before winding in a wisp of his own greenish-gold magic and replacing the dark blue on top of it. Once the dark blue is back in place, he frees the golden thread from the finger it is anchored to and releases it, sending it shooting back into Black’s body. He leaves the man frozen whilst he does the same to Lucius and Snape, unwilling to be distracted or attacked whilst he is working such intricate magic. When he is done with all three, he leans back in his seat and unfreezes them with a casual flick of his fingers once more.

“Now that I have dealt with your vow, we may talk about horcruxes,” he says calmly.

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Narcissa enters the Malfoy townhouse in Kensington early in the morning. The house elf in charge greets her and takes her cloak swiftly, before informing her that breakfast is ready in the drawing room as she had requested the previous day. Even though she is desperate to begin her work on the ritual, she forces herself to keep to her morning routine and takes her breakfast as normal, flicking through the latest edition of *Magical Mansion and Gardens*. She barely registers what any of the articles are suggesting and sees nothing she wishes to implement in any of the Malfoy properties. Her mind is elsewhere, thinking of her son - who is *still* missing - and of her sister and of the plans she has.

It has been a week and a half since Draco disappeared and Lucius is continuing to fob her off with excuses as to why Draco has not been found. Apparently he has hired a private investigator, who assures them that he has leads he is following up, but nothing substantial yet. Lucius had also told her that he has sent several letters to Draco, all of which have been delivered, but that the owl has been somewhere untraceable. Each excuse from her husband seems less plausible than the last, so she has been gathering ingredients to brew and use a tracking potion of her own, and she will do so once she has finished her morning tea, before she then returns to the ritual.

Her breakfast finished, she orders the house elves that she must not be disturbed and retreats to her personal rooms on the second floor of the house, locking the door with a spell and layering several wards over it to alert her to anyone's presence. Once satisfied with her spellwork, she moves to the table where the potion should have finished brewing. She checks the instructions in the book next to the cauldron before analysing colour and texture and smell to determine its readiness. Pleased, Narcissa opens the large atlas to a map of the world and drops a small amount of potion in each of the four corners. After a few moments, the droplets begin to glow and move, sweeping across the map until they cover North America. She flicks through the atlas to a more detailed page of North America and repeats the process. The potion coalesces over New York and immediately she remembers the arguments she and Draco had over the course of the summer. He had wanted to transfer from Hogwarts to the New York Academy of Magical Arts. She had said no, so clearly he has taken matters into his own hands. *Foolish, headstrong boy.*

She ponders telling Lucius and sending him to New York to retrieve their son before deciding she will do so herself, but not until she has finalised the ritual. Once she has Draco back at home, she does not want to wait before performing it; she does not want to afford him time to become suspicious or to plot a second escape. He is resourceful, so he is likely doing just fine in New York, but she will not delay any longer just in case.

Turning away from the potion remains, she moves across the light airy space of her private den to where she had left the tome with the ritual in. It is an ancient tome, filled with rituals to do with the soul and when she had originally happened upon it, she had thought it all myth and had ridiculed the very ideas contained within. But then she had heard of the Dark Lord's horcruxes - whispers amongst the Death Eaters and their wives, stories of the Dark Lord's immortality and how he had achieved it; tales of objects, hidden and secreted away across the country as protection against any who might kill him. Bellatrix is the perfect distraction, of course, and the perfect way of finding such an object, only her sister has been disappointingly unsuccessful thus far. Someone else is hunting for them - Dumbledore, no doubt - and has been destroying them before Bellatrix can get her hands on them. But once Narcissa has one... oh, then - *then* everything will be well. And Bellatrix is not far off - she has found the trail of those who are also hunting the horcruxes and is going to track them down today. No doubt there will be news of another massacre in the paper tomorrow morning.

The ritual itself is not overly complex. It requires very few things - only a few potions, two of which Narcissa has already brewed, and silk bonding ribbons. Some of the ingredients had been difficult to find - basilisk venom was rare, expensive *and* illegal to sell (in this country, at least; she had found a merchant in Saudi Arabia willing to sell some - for a hefty sum, of course) and phoenix tears were even rarer. But she had managed, and two of the potions are finished, and the other should be finished today. Its currently simmering on a low heat and later she will add the final ingredients before leaving it overnight to strengthen.

In the mean time, she reads through the ritual again. The first potion is used to weaken the bond between soul fragment and object, making the fragment easy to transfer. The silk bonding ribbons are then used to bind the object to the hands of the subject - *Draco* - so they cannot pull away from the danger the horcrux may present. If the subject pulls away, the ritual will not work. The second potion, the one containing basilisk venom, is then fed to the subject and the ritual's sole spell is cast, the chant repeated continuously whilst the soul fragment passes from object to subject. Once the transfer is complete, the subject must be left alone for three hours whilst the second potion works to kill the soul fragment whilst retaining its power. Once that time is up, the potion with the phoenix tears is used to heal any damage the basilisk venom and the horcrux may have left behind, and to bind the power left by the soul fragment securely.

And all of this will give Draco the power she wants for him - the power to make him a stronger wizard than his peers, to protect him, to set up him for greater things - things beyond what even Lucius has dreamt up for him. Narcissa will see her son successful and powerful and *safe* and if this is the only way she can do it, then so be it. She will let no one stand in her way - including her sister. Once Narcissa has the horcrux from Bellatrix, it will take very little effort to be rid of her, and then that chapter of her life and that of the Dark Lord will be closed forever.

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Loki is analysing the soul fragment in the locket Black had presented them with when he feels it. He has pulled out an image of the soul, much like he had done with Hávarðr when he had first investigated what was lurking in Hávarðr's head. There had been some minor bickering and protestations from his current companions after he had adapted their vow, but it had died down after he had explained the reason why he was with them - that their Dark Lord had turned his son into a horcrux and he needed a way to destroy it without hurting or killing his son. Their research is of little help, as thus far they have only needed to know how to destroy a horcrux, with little worry for saving the object it is attached to. Still, they have a horcrux with them that he can examine, and *that* is the most helpful news he has had in several days.

The soul fragment contained in the locket is shot through with black, dark and ugly and if Loki had not experienced the suffering and the horrors he had these last few years, he would have undoubtedly shrunk away from it. With a quick containment spell, he is able to somewhat prevent the malevolence from seeping out too far - though he suspects it may not be for long - so he can examine the link between the fragment and the object. It is complex - the soul sewn - no, *woven* into the magical aura of the object and unpicking it as he did the threads of the vow would be nigh on impossible. Somehow the weave of it needs to be weakened first, but he does not know how that would be possible without causing damage to the object as well. He supposes this is why destruction of the object is the easiest method of destroying the soul fragment as well.

He is about to at least attempt unpicking it, when he feels it again. A persistent itching along his right forearm which has him freezing where he's sat. The others, who have been watching him work in silence, look at him oddly.

"Your highness?" Lucius tries cautiously. Loki does not respond, but instead pushes up his right sleeve hurriedly. Runes glow and angry red and he inhales sharply.

“Hávarðr,” he whispers, and teleports.

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Harry sits in the living room on the Avengers’ common floor with Draco and Peter, focussed on the screen in front of him. Peter laughs next to him as his character bumps into Harry’s as it speeds past and Harry swears loudly. On his other side, Draco rolls his eyes and resumes reading his book. It has been two days without a major incident and Harry is feeling much more relaxed now, pleased to have Draco and Peter with him, keeping him distracted from thoughts of his *Móðir* via MarioKart and films and school work. His father had called the school, having previously hacked in to add himself as a parent to Harry’s file, and requested time off for Harry due to family difficulties. The school had agreed on the condition that Harry was to continue studying at home, so every day Peter dropped by with school work and stayed for a while, helping to distract Harry and to catch up with his friend.

Draco and Peter had been invaluable to him since his *Móðir* had vanished and Harry is so grateful for them. His father has been helpful too, teaching him science and engineering in between meetings and meeting deadlines, and Harry hasn’t had so much fun since he discovered flying and Quidditch. His *Móðir*’s disappearance is constantly in the back of his mind though and he feels perpetually jumpy and nervous, his left hand shaking every now and then and his magic boiling underneath his skin. When that happens, he uses that image Draco gave him - the one of the snitch - to focus himself and calm down and so far it has worked. He’s only set two sets of curtains on fire and exploded three mugs since that last major incident.

When the current race ends with Peter the victor, Harry sets aside his controller with a sigh and curls up on the sofa as Peter vanishes to the bathroom. His mind drifts and he finds himself thinking of his *Móðir* again, wondering whether he will ever come back, wondering whether his *Móðir* and his father will ever get past this, wondering if his father is really searching for evidence that his *Móðir* wasn’t himself during the invasion, wondering whether his uncle Thor will really help. His heart hurts when he thinks of his *Móðir* and of the time they spent together. Of how his *Móðir* had rescued him and kept him from the Dementor’s Kiss, had brought him away from the fickle Wizarding World to start a new life, had given him a family once more...

Harry sighs and stands up slowly.

“You want any food? I’m hungry,” he says, ignoring Draco’s knowing look. He knows it’s dangerous to continue thinking along these lines, that if he does his magic might spiral out of control again, but today he doesn’t feel anxious or scared, unlike the last few times. Today he just feels sad.

“Some of those odd chocolate biscuits with the creamy filling would be acceptable,” Draco answers. Harry nods tiredly and leaves Draco reading on the sofa. Steve had handed Draco the Lord of the Rings the other day when his friend had complained of being bored and Draco has been glued to it ever since. Every now and then he’ll exclaim that magic would have solved this or that, but he mostly he’s been enraptured by it. Harry knows there are films as well, but he’s waiting until Draco’s finished reading before asking his father or Steve about those.

When he enters the kitchen, Steve and the Black Widow - *Natasha* - are leaving and Hawkeye - *Clint* - is still stood at the central island with a mug of what Harry thinks is coffee, looking at his phone. When he spots Harry, he lowers his phone and stares at him, silently and with none of his usual cheery greeting. Unnerved, Harry ignores him and heads for the cupboard with the Oreos in, hauling down an entirely unopened packet, before moving to another cupboard to get a new can of coke. When he turns around again, Clint is still staring at him.

“Is everything okay?” He asks. Clint does not respond.

“Are you okay? Or did I do something?” He repeats, watching Clint worriedly. After another moment of silence, Clint speaks.

“Did you do something? I don’t know, you little shit,” Clint says angrily. “Are you planning on doing something? Did Mommy Dearest send you here to spy on us? To pretend to be Stark’s kid and learn all of our weaknesses? To get into our heads? Is that why you’re here?”

Harry shrinks back against the kitchen cabinets, his heart suddenly pounding in his chest at the surprising onslaught of vitriol from someone who has previously been nothing but pleasant to him.

Clint rounds the central island quickly and is suddenly in Harry’s space, glaring down at him.

“Is that why you’re here? Huh? Because if that’s it, I will take you down, no questions asked. I don’t care what your *daddy* says,” Clint hisses. Harry swallows hard, feeling his magic surge inside him and tries to breathe, tries to focus on that image of the snitch, but him closing his eyes only seems to infuriate Clint further.

“What? Not good enough for you? I was good enough for your mommy to brainwash!”

“Please,” Harry whispers, opening his eyes. Clint is still glaring down at him.

“Please what? Kneel? That’s how mommy likes it, right? Is that what he’s been teaching you? How to rob people of their minds and make them kneel?”

Harry flinches backwards again, wishing he could move further away from the enraged man who has cornered him, but there is nowhere he can go. He feels his magic flicker under his skin, crawling, surging, trying to find a way out and he ruthlessly tries to push it down, even as his fear and anxiety climb through the roof.

“JARVIS,” he whispers and moments later he hears the elevator doors open and the ring of metal. Mjolnir crashes into the kitchen cabinet just above Harry’s head and Clint whirls around almost immediately. Thor is in the doorway, glaring at Clint as he stretches out his hand and the hammer flies back into it.

“Barton, we have discussed this,” Thor says evenly, though Harry can hear the fury behind it.

“Yeah, you went on and on about how your *sainted* brother was innocent, that he was brainwashed too, that it wasn’t his fault and that you would prove him innocent. But there is

no proof, Thor! Loki is guilty. He came here, he tried to take over the world. He brainwashed people - brainwashed *me* and had no remorse afterwards. And what did he get for it? Locked in his room and then released to give you a hand and a quick, *honourable* death? Only guess what? He's actually alive and well and living on earth, plotting his next move and sending in his kid to spy on us and brainwash us all!" Clint shouts.

"You will not touch my nephew!" Thor shouts back. "You do not have to believe that Loki is innocent, but Harry is. Do not take out my brother's crimes on his son."

As they argue, Harry begins to feel nauseous as his magic rolls around inside him, surging and pushing at his control. His hands are glowing green now and try as he might, he cannot find a way to focus - not even the snitch is working. His magic crackles down his arms and into his fingertips and he trembles with the effort of keeping it in. Just across the room, the refrigerator begins to shake, the jars and bottles on top moving to the edge and tumbling off with a crash. Across the room, Thor and Clint have stopped arguing, but it doesn't help; Harry doesn't notice as he struggles to keep himself from doing any more damage. He's done enough to his dad's Tower; his dad's replaced too much already because of his inability to control his magic. He doesn't want to cause any more problems or hurt anyone else, but he can't help it, it's too strong and too powerful and he has no idea how to stop it and *Móðir* isn't here to help him and he wishes *Móðir* was here, wishes they could be back at the apartment where this wasn't happening and where he was *safe*.

Clint vanishes out of the kitchen as Thor approaches him cautiously and Harry barely notices before he is flinging up a hand to protect himself and a vicious green bolt arcs out from his palm, striking Thor in the chest. Harry watches in horror as his uncle collapses right in front of him.

"I've killed him. Shit, I've killed him. *I've killed him!* I didn't mean to, I swear I didn't mean to. I can't help it, I don't know what I'm doing!" Harry cries. Draco is in the door of the kitchen now, watching Harry with wide eyes.

"The snitch, Harry! Think of the bloody snitch!" He shouts.

"I tried! I tried and it's not working. I can't do it anymore!"

"*Harry!*" A voice snaps, interrupting Harry's panic. Harry stops talking and looks up in panic to see his dad coming towards him, hands outstretched in a placating gesture. Harry's hands are still glowing toxic green and he moves backwards, pushing himself against the kitchen cabinets and away from Tony.

"Don't come near me. Don't touch me! I'll hurt you too," he says fearfully. "I know what that spell does. It was *Avada Kedavra*. I've killed him. I didn't mean to. I swear I didn't mean to. I didn't even know I could do it!"

"Just calm down, Harry. It's okay," Tony says. His tone is soothing, but all Harry can see is Thor's body on the floor in front of him and the green surrounding his hands and all he can feel is the crackling, burning rage of his magic threatening to break loose once again.

“I can’t stop it. I can’t make it stop!” He says hysterically. The green glows more intensely and he cries out at the painful sensation of his magic surging. His dad takes another step closer, Draco not far behind.

“Stop! *Don’t come near me!*” Harry insists. “I’ll only end up hurting you.”

They both halt and take a moment to assess the situation. Harry watches Draco look between Tony, the body and Harry’s glowing green hands. He seems as though he’s going to take another step, so Harry flings out a hand to stop him and another bolt of green magic shoots from his palms. Draco dives to the side out of its path and it strikes the wall behind him, leaving a dent and a dark, sooty mark.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Draco. I don’t know what to do. I can’t stop it!” Harry says frantically. His magic is roaring with fear and rage inside him and he feels as though he’s going to explode with the force and power of it. He does not know what to do and he can only see both Tony and Draco getting hurt and dying if they stay with him.

“You can’t stay here,” he tries, looking between the both of them. “It’s getting worse and if you stay you’re going to get hurt. *Please.*”

“It’s your magical core, isn’t it?” Draco says; a small measure of understanding dawning on him.

“*What?!*” Tony exclaims.

“My magical core is going to explode. It’s like overloading a generator, dad. You need to go. Both of you. Before I kill you both,” Harry is a little calmer now. It washes over him as he realises what is going to happen. The glow surrounding his hands is extending up his arms and seems to intensify as he glances down. It almost hurts to look at it. As long as Draco and his dad leave, everything will be fine.

“Harry—”

“You have to go,” Harry repeats. “I’ll be fine.”

Around him, the shaking intensifies and several things catch fire and Tony and Draco both duck and roll for cover as glass shatters and wood splinters. The lights flicker dramatically and Harry thinks he hears JARVIS trying to report system damage, but then he’s screaming, screaming, screaming and Draco and his dad are still there watching but he can’t do or say anything any longer because the magic the burning the crackling rage fire is everywhere everywhere *everywhere*—

Everything stops.

Gentle greenish-gold fills his vision and surrounds him like a silken cocoon.

*Móðir.*

## **Chapter 18: On Overdue Conversations and Betrayal**



As his own magic envelopes Hávarðr, the toxic green glow dims a little and then vanishes. Hávarðr looks at him, unseeing and delirious, then his eyes roll back in his head and he collapses forwards. Loki moves swiftly and catches him before he hits the ground, sweeping him up into his arms. With Hávarðr safe, Loki looks around the devastated room and swallows hard at what he sees. The kitchen is a mess, with crockery and jars smashed on the floor, wooden cabinets splintered and doors falling off their hinges. One of the cabinets has a suspiciously hammer-shaped crack in it, and Loki's eyes narrow on the hulking shape of his (not) brother unconscious on the floor. If Thor has been in any way responsible for this, Loki will not be lenient, not after all Thor has failed to do in the past. On the opposite side of the central island to where Loki teleported in, Tony and Draco stand, watching him with wary, concerned expressions. Loki looks at Tony.

"Where might I lay him down?" He asks quietly, evenly. He knows this is the first time Tony has seen him in his real form since the invasion, knows that Tony was likely aware of just who Lucas and Tom really were by now, given Thor's presence in the Tower, but that knowledge doesn't make the situation any less precarious or difficult. It is irrelevant though, in the light of Hávarðr's health and wellbeing and right now, that is what Loki needs to see to. When Tony doesn't respond, Loki raises a questioning eyebrow and he stirs into action, waving out of the kitchen and into the living room.

"Um... his room's being fixed at the moment. There was some... uh, destruction in there too, so the couch will have to do for now," Tony says awkwardly. Loki nods and brushes past Stark as they enter the living room, gently laying Hávarðr down on the long sofa and then kneeling on the floor beside it. With Hávarðr unconscious, it is easy to pull out the image of his magical core to get a better idea of what is wrong. The image hovers a foot above where Hávarðr is lying; the usually vibrant greenish-gold with mischievous red flecks looks tired and sickly, the ominous black by Hávarðr's head ever-present and threatening.

With painstaking precision, he temporarily wraps his own magic around Hávarðr's, taking care to be gentle and not to damage his son's rather strong magical core any further. He focuses on the sickly and tired looking areas, supporting them with his own magic, but he gives the horcrux a wide berth. It takes a long time, doing something that needs this much care and attention, but fortunately Draco and Tony somehow seem to know that he cannot be distracted from what he is doing. Eventually, when he is satisfied with how Hávarðr's magical core looks, he carefully releases the image and it settles back into Hávarðr's body. Loki leans back on his heels and swipes a wrist across his forehead, exhausted and sweating from the effort and precision needed. His hands tremble from adrenaline and fear and he lets out a long slow breath, hopeful and relieved.

"*Jesus*," Tony swears, low and shaky. *Quite*, Loki thinks in agreement. He does not voice it. He isn't sure quite how he is going to speak to Tony yet. He doesn't know whether they will even be able to speak - whether Tony will want to.

"Is... is he okay? What did you do?" Draco whispers from behind him.

"Hávarðr will be fine," Loki answers, his certainty growing with his words. His son - *their* son is strong; this he is sure of. "I am temporarily supporting his magic with my own. His own is under significant strain. But do not worry, I do not need to be here to do so. I can still support his magic from a distance."

He deliberately does not look at Tony as he says this; he does not wish to see how unwelcome he is on the face he knows and loves dearly. Instead he keeps his gaze on Hávarðr, travelling over the familiar features. He allows himself to touch Hávarðr's hair, carding his fingers through it. He misses his son. It has not been long, but the weeks and months that had spent together before all of this came out had become normal. His own foolishness and weakness had been his downfall and now he could not be here with his son - not for much longer, anyway. He will take this brief opportunity to see Hávarðr and to make sure he is well and safe and then he will go once more. He has work to do, after all, work that will ensure Hávarðr's safety in the long term.

Loki sits there for a few minutes more before Hávarðr begins to shift. He is nearing consciousness, not quite there yet, but Loki takes this as his cue and rises slowly from his knees. He moves away from the sofa and prepares to teleport, but instead pauses, risking a quick glance at Tony, wanting to see him once more before leaving. Tony is watching him, and the look in his eyes halts Loki's movements. Tony is angry, Loki is certain of that, but there is something else there, concern and worry and something that Loki does not want to call hope for fear of it not being true. He swallows and turns away, ready to teleport, but Tony's words stop him.

"If you leave again, he will never forgive you."

Loki does not turn around. His shoulders slump in weariness and despair. He knows Tony is right, but what else can he do?

"What choice do I have?"

"To stay and support him. He *needs* you," Tony says.

"He has you now," Loki replies, closing his eyes. He hears Tony sigh in irritation.

"Yeah, sure, because I know about magic and his weird physiology and what Asgardian courting rituals are like and whatever other questions he might have. I can give him science lessons and a roof over his head and that's it."

"You give him much more than that," Loki answers. "Since the beginning he has wanted to know his father. All boys want their fathers - some are more fortunate to have one and now Hávarðr has you. There is no place for me here, not one that will not cause further problems. It is safer for Hávarðr if I leave. If he hates me for it, so be it."

"Stay, *please*," Tony says tiredly. "Boys need their mothers too - this one more than most, what with the whole crazy magic thing. And would you turn around already? Such a melodramatic little shit. *Jesus*."

Loki rubs his hand across his eyes, swiping at the traitorous tears that have gathered there before turning around again. Tony is lowering himself onto the sofa by Hávarðr's head, his left hand reaching across his body to stroke Hávarðr's hair gently. He speaks without looking up at Loki.

"He needs both of us, so whatever problems we have get put aside right now - but don't think that means you get out of explaining yourself, Rudolph," Tony snipes. Somewhat relieved,

Loki comes closer. He knows he shouldn't stay, but Tony's permission is really all that he needs and wants and he will take this opportunity to be with his son. He resumes his earlier position kneeling by the sofa and runs a quick magical scan of Hávarðr just to be sure. Hávarðr's magic is settled now and he shouldn't have the same reaction as before.

Hávarðr's head moves under Tony's hand, his face turning towards Loki and eyes opening slowly. He seems calm and docile at first, but suddenly he panics, bolting into an upright position and trying to get up. Loki ushers him to lie down again.

"None of that, Hávarðr. Everything is fine, I promise you," he murmurs. Hávarðr's eyes fix on his face and Loki watches the panic in his eyes recede, only to be replaced by tears.

"*Móðir*," he says; his voice is thick with emotion as he reaches for Loki with a shaking hand. Loki takes his son's hand and holds it tightly.

"I'm here, Hávarðr. I'm here and you are fine," Loki assures him. It doesn't seem to help.

"But Uncle Thor - I killed him. I didn't mean to, but I killed him," Hávarðr cries. *Uncle Thor?* Loki resists the urge to roll his eyes and instead focuses on Hávarðr and what happened before he arrived.

"And what makes you think that?" He asks gently.

"I killed him," Hávarðr repeats.

"The spell," Draco interjects from behind them. Loki had almost forgotten he was there. "The spell was *Avada Kedavra*; the killing curse."

Loki looks back at Draco and frowns.

"Midgardian magic? And a spell that strong without a wand?"

Draco shrugs. "It was green like the killing curse, but he didn't say the spell. It just kind of happened."

*Ah.* Loki shakes his head and looks back at his son.

"Remember what I told you, Hávarðr," he begins. "Our magic is different to Midgardian magic. The colour of our magic has nothing to do with the spell you are casting, but everything to do with the colour of your own magic."

Hávarðr looks unsure and as though he might protest, but Loki demonstrates his own magic to allay any concerns. His hands glow greenish-gold as he forms a ball of flame in his left palm. Extinguishing it a moment later, he looks back at Hávarðr.

"Your inherent magic – that which I will teach you to cast from – will remain the same colour no matter what spell you cast," he repeats, his tone gentle. Hávarðr still looks worried.

"But when the spell hit him, he collapsed," he says.

“And what was he doing at the time when you cast the spell? Was he threatening you?” Loki demands, internally vowing retribution on his (not) brother should he have even *thought* about harming a hair on Hávarðr’s head. Next to Hávarðr, Tony snorts.

“Hardly,” he says. “Though now that you mention it, what was going on? J, care to elaborate?”

“Of course, sir,” JARVIS says primly. Loki smiles to hear JARVIS’ cool, confident tones again - and is that a hint of anger in them too? What had happened? The television screen lights up and the security footage from the kitchen plays - Hávarðr is collecting a snack, Barton watching him from by the island and everything suddenly makes sense as he watches and listens to Barton intimidating and bullying Hávarðr and he feels all at once anger at Barton and sadness and remorse for indirectly causing this through his own actions. He keeps watching as Thor charges in to confront Barton and help Hávarðr, and then tries and fails to calm Hávarðr down, before being hit by Hávarðr’s magic. Thor will be fine, he thinks, though he may wake with a rather strong headache.

“J, get Barton and the rest of them up here, *now*,” Tony spits as the video finishes. Loki looks at him and he is positively vibrating with anger and he thinks it quite terrifying. He would not want to be Tony’s enemy on the battlefield if he were in this state, of that he is certain.

“All but Mr Odinson and Agent Barton are on their way, sir,” JARVIS says a moment later. “Mr Odinson is currently waking in the kitchen and Agent Barton is not on the premises. I shall try his cell phone.”

At JARVIS’ words, Hávarðr relaxes significantly and seems to breathe a little easier.

“He’s alive,” he murmurs quietly. Loki smiles and reaches out to stroke his son’s cheek.

“He is rather hard to kill, Hávarðr,” he says wryly. Hávarðr and Tony look at him in disbelief but Draco snickers as he moves to sit next to Hávarðr on the sofa.

“It is true, is it not?” Loki says to Tony with a grin. Tony rolls his eyes and shakes his head, but Loki thinks he can see the smile he is trying to suppress. A few minutes later, the elevator doors whoosh open and three Avengers enter the living room, two of them looking rather bewildered, the other - *Romanov* - looking as impassive and calm as ever. Loki ignores them when they spot him, but pretends to pay attention to the quiet conversation Draco is engaging Hávarðr in to distract him. Tony stands to greet the others, folding his arms across his chest as he glares at them all.

“I know we spoke about this the other night and I know Thor spoke to you all as well, but what happened today is *not* acceptable and is *not* going to happen again or you will all be out of here faster than Cap can throw his shield,” Tony begins. Banner looks back, bewildered. The Captain’s gaze is darting between Tony, Loki and Hávarðr and Loki wonders if he will work it out, but Romanov just calmly moves her gaze from Loki to Tony, her expression never changing. Loki is sure she has worked out what happened. Barton’s absence has no doubt given it away.

“What happened, Tony?” Banner asks, confused. Tony gestures for JARVIS to play the footage once more. JARVIS takes the liberty of showing Loki arriving to help Hávarðr as well, and Loki wonders at how terrified he looked on arrival. He does not remember feeling such fear, but given what had taken place activated the runes on his arm, he supposes he likely did.

When the footage finishes, Banner looks a little green around the edges and the Captain looks uncomfortable. Tony turns to Romanov.

“I will be speaking with Barton. I don’t care if I have to track him down to Madripoor to do so. I don’t care what he thinks of Loki; I don’t care if he wants to shoot Loki in the eye with an arrow. I don’t care. Sure, he’s got PTSD and a boatload of issues - don’t we all? But that’s no excuse. To do that to Harry is so far over the line its not even visible,” Tony snaps. His gaze shifts to the others. “And if *any* of you do that, you will be out of here. Understood?”

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Thor hovers in the doorway of Harry’s bedroom, watching as discreetly as he can. He has no doubt that his brother knows he is there, but he does not want to intrude right now. At present, Loki is sitting on Harry’s bed, back against the headboard, humming softly and stroking Harry’s hair as the boy falls asleep. It is a much softer image of his brother than Thor has seen in years, one he is rather unused to at this point, given all that has happened recently. He looks away for a moment a smiles to himself as he thinks of other times when he’s seen this softness in his brother’s features - usually when looking at their mother, or at his other children.

Thor halts that thought almost as soon as it appears in his mind. It does not lead to pleasant or easy thoughts and he just wants to enjoy this moment for now. His other nephews and his nieces will no doubt come up in the conversation they must have, but for now he just wants to enjoy the sight of his brother, calm and peaceful, gentle and loving. So often in recent years Loki has been harsh and unyielding, exuding an air of confident malice. With what Harry has told him, Thor wonders how much of that was a front - how much of it was built to hide how much Loki was truly hurting. Not that Loki could ever be described as weak, of course. Loki would skin him if he even thought it.

Tony had told him what had happened whilst he was unconscious. At that point, Loki had used spells to fix both the kitchen and Harry’s bedroom and sequestered them away in there, so this is the first time Thor is seeing his brother since the mess on Svartalfheim. His brother looks healthy, if tired, with no evidence of the wound the Kursed gave him. He had watched the footage of Loki’s arrival, of how fearful he had looked as he had restrained Harry’s magic and caught him. Thor wouldn’t have thought otherwise, but from that footage, Thor has no doubt that Loki dearly loves Harry and is terrified of losing him and yet, he was prepared to leave because of his past.

Tony isn’t happy to have Loki in the Tower - he didn’t say it, but Thor could tell - but knows it is more important that Harry has his mother nearby. At the very least to help with his magic when he cannot control it, but Thor thinks that with Loki here, those outbursts will be rarer. In his experience, outbursts like that always follow hard on the heels of emotional turmoil. It was that way with Loki, when he was younger and less in tune with his magic.

The other Avengers - excluding Barton, who has vanished and not reappeared yet - have differing opinions on Loki's presence. Banner seems less upset than even Tony to have Loki in the Tower, but the Captain and Lady Natasha are suspicious and concerned and have vowed to keep watch for any misdeeds. Thor does not believe there will be any, not now that Loki has Harry to look after.

Movement in the room distracts Thor from his thoughts and he focuses again, watching Loki cover Harry with the bedclothes and press a gentle kiss to the boy's forehead. With a whispered instruction to JARVIS, the lights dim and then Loki flicks his fingers and a glow surrounds the bed briefly before settling and fading into the air. Thor assumes his brother is casting some kind of monitoring spell to keep an eye on Harry - their mother used to cast it on them when they were small. Thor shifts where he is leaning against the door frame and allows Loki to exit the room, closing the door behind him, before he gestures in the direction of the Penthouse's living room. With a grimace and a roll of his eyes, Loki consents and walks ahead of Thor into the spacious room where Stark is waiting, glass of scotch in hand. The conversation ahead of them is hard, and Thor does not begrudge his friend a drink to get him through out - after all, it will likely be a harder conversation for him than Thor. Still, Thor collects his own beer from the kitchen and settles onto the sofa near Stark, who points at a waiting drink on the coffee table.

"Gin and tonic, right?" Stark says from over his glass, barely glancing up at Loki when he sits in the chair opposite the sofa.

"Thank you," Loki murmurs quietly, lifting the glass and taking a small sip. A sad, bittersweet smile plays around his mouth for a moment afterwards and Thor thinks that this is perhaps the drink Loki would have when he lived on Midgard with Stark all those years ago. It must be painful, he thinks, and wonders if Stark meant it on purpose.

"Harry fall asleep okay?" Stark continues after a moment.

"Yes. I have set a ward to inform me should he have nightmares also," Loki replies evenly. Tony nods in acknowledgement and then falls silent. Thor watches his brother for a moment and thinks of the last time he saw him, ashen grey and bleeding, dying in his arms and still finding the strength to protest against their father. Thor swallows hard and clenches his jaw at the strength of the memory; at the feel of Loki dying in his arms.

And yet here his brother sits. Alive. Healthy.

"I thought you dead. Again," Thor says lowly. He thinks he should be angry, but he's just tired. Tired of mourning loved ones.

"I almost was," Loki replies. "You left me for dead in the dust storms of Svartalfheim."

"So you faked dying in my arms?" Thor questions, and there is the anger, simmering with great familiarity just below his skin. Outside somewhere, thunder rolls.

"Of course. Wouldn't you, if you had been promised prison as a reward?" Loki leans back in his chair and smugly sips from his drink. Thor wants to grab him and hit him and punish him for all the lies and the grief, but he knows that will get them nowhere. He sighs.

“I suppose I should have expected it. But what then? Did you come to Midgard immediately?”

“I visited some old haunts, one could say, before Hávarðr needed my help. That was when I came to Midgard,” Loki explains, looking at Stark briefly. Stark does not acknowledge Loki, but instead moves to refill his glass from the bottle that sits on the table.

“After that I... made some errors in judgement,” Loki acknowledges. Stark snorts in disbelief.

“Putting it mildly, Bambi,” he comments, glaring just a little.

“I regret that I deceived you again. I had missed you and you were so near to me now... I may be wiser than Thor but even my wisdom has its limits.”

“Brother,” Thor says admonishingly. Loki glares at him.

“Not your brother, Thor. How many times do I have to remind you of that fact?” Loki snaps. Thor winces at the anger in his brother’s tone, but it does not deter him.

“No, Loki,” he begins. “You are my brother, no matter how much you protest it. And I will always be there for you.”

“My brother, are you? Then where were you when Odin took my children? Where were you when he enslaved Sleipnir and banished Hela and Jörmungandr? Where were you when he imprisoned Fenrir with Gleipnir? When he destroyed Narvi and Váli?” Loki’s voice gets louder as he lists all the ways Thor has failed him and Thor wants to simultaneously flinch away and pull Loki into a tight embrace.

“Where were you when I fell through the Void? Where were you when I was taken from the Void and interrogated - beaten and tortured until I *broke*, when my mind was taken and I was ordered to rain destruction on a world where two I loved dearly lived? *Where were you then, Thor?*”

Loki subsides almost immediately, his face clearing into a passive mask as if he knows he’s said too much and revealed too much of his emotions. Thor is out of his seat and around the coffee table as fast as he can move then, grabbing Loki up in that tight embrace even as his brother tries to fight him off. He just holds him tightly and waits until the fight drains out of Loki and he stops struggling, falling limp against Thor. His body shakes and Thor knows Loki is crying. He whispers soothing words into Loki’s ear and holds the back of his neck tightly, like he used to until his brother quiets again. He releases him then and steps back just a little.

“I have failed you as a brother. I did not stand up to father as I should have. I was a coward and you and your children paid the price for it. But I swear to you-”

Loki scoffs and looks away, but Thor takes him by the back of the neck and forces their eyes to meet.

“I swear to you, *on my life*, I will do everything in my power to protect you and Harry.”

There is a moment's pause, but then Loki rolls his eyes and scowls.

"You are such a *bilgesnipe*, Thor," he complains. Thor cannot help but grin at him and slap him on the shoulder as he used to. Loki winces and pulls away a little, massaging at the area, but Thor sees the small smile Loki has afterwards as they sit down once more. They have a long way to go, but Thor knows this is a start.

"So... now that the bromantic love-in is done, its true, then? That you were tortured? Controlled like Barton?" Stark interrupts, looking straight at Loki. Thor watches his brother carefully, remembering both Harry's words to him before and Loki's own just now. Loki looks away from them both and his hands start to tremble. When he speaks, it is with far more detail than Harry had ever mentioned.

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She slams through the wards viciously, tearing through the multiple protection spells with little care for her own health and safety. She thinks her shoulder is bleeding, but it matters not - not when she has to deal with something of far greater importance. A quick, brutal *Bombarda* has the doors splintering before her and she steps through the debris to be confronted by two house elves. They die quickly; she has little time or patience to play with them today.

"Cissy!" She calls through the cavernous halls of Malfoy Manor. "*Dearest* sister!"

When there is no response, she snarls and continues her hunt, meeting several more house elves on the way. Soon, a trail of bodies and destroyed doors follows her as she searches room after room looking for her traitorous sister and her husband.

"Oh Cissy!" She shouts. "I've come for a visit! To catch up with the *family*."

Her blood boils at the thought of what she's discovered. All this time, as she has been plotting to bring back her beloved Master, her own family has been plotting against her. She can only imagine that Narcissa freed her for this quest of Lucius' in the first place. She was to lead them to the horcruxes - the ones more difficult to find anyway. By taking out the Cup and the Locket, it would enrage her enough that she would find the others faster and so lead Lucius to them. She sneers with contempt at the thought of him. The obsequious flatterer, with his silver tongue pouring words into her Lord's ear. His word taken as Gospel and his strategies and invaluable. Yes, her Lord had loved her the most. He had loved her and loved her and *loved her* in all ways and she had drenched herself in it, but Lucius? He had the Dark Lord's ear. She may have had her Lord's bed, but he had her Lord's ear and it had long infuriated her. The spineless, lily-livered coward. And now what was he doing? Destroying her Lord's horcruxes so he would not return. There's loyalty for you. Ha!

"Come on, Cissy. Don't make me wait all day! You know how much I *hate* waiting," Bellatrix coos. Another house elf falls with a swift spell and she pays no mind as she steps on and over its corpse, her heel sliding into its eye with a squelch. She cackles.

Oh, she has such plans for what she will do with Lucius. Such *delicious* plans. She wishes her Lord could see them. Perhaps he will. Perhaps what she will do is exact a little revenge now then keep the traitorous wretch alive whilst she completes her mission and then she and



her Lord can enjoy *playing* with the once mighty and proud Lucius Malfoy. She bites her lip at the thought of it. Its going to be *exquisite*.

“You called, Bella dear?”

Bellatrix whirls, wand at the ready, but before she can cast, her wand is out of her hand and she is bound by a lightning-fast *incarcerous*. She laughs wildly. She didn’t know her sister had it in her.

“Where’s your treacherous, spineless husband, Cissy?” Bellatrix demands, pulling at her bonds. Narcissa simply looks at her coolly.

“He’s away on business. Can I take a message for him? Though I’m not sure why you would want to speak to him - perhaps you can enlighten me, sister dear?”

Bellatrix spits at her sister as she comes closer.

“You know what he’s doing,” she hisses. “You broke me out to lead him to the hidden ones so he could destroy them all.”

Narcissa’s expression doesn’t change at all.

“Oh?”

“He’s destroying the horcruxes. So much for the Dark Lord’s most loyal! I always knew he was a spineless, treacherous coward!” Bellatrix shouts. “And you know what happens to traitors, don’t you?”

“Yes, darling,” Narcissa says calmly. “Usually the Dark Lord lets you have your way.”

Bellatrix smiles at the thought of all the traitors she’d had the pleasure of dealing with over the years. She only wished she could have dealt with Cousin Regulus. He would have squirmed and screamed most prettily, and would have begged for death long before she finished. He would lose his voice before the end, and would only croak in a rather irritating manner before she would cut out his vocal cords. Lucius will be much the same, she thinks.

“I will have my way with Lucius, Cissy. I will find him,” she says with a grin. “And I’m going to enjoy every minute.”

“I’m sure you would, if you were going to live long enough to do it,” Narcissa says serenely. Bellatrix frowns at her sister’s words and -

## **Chapter 19: On Families and Floo Calls**

Tony isn’t sure what to think as he sits at one end of the long couch, pretending to do work on his tablet. In reality, he’s watching Loki teach Harry magic (the word still gives him hives, but this is his *son*, so he’s working on accepting the idea) and trying not to be jealous of the close connection they seem to have.

Loki has been in the Tower for a week now and he has been practically glued to Harry's side in that short (though it felt *incredibly* long) period of time. After Loki had told Tony and Thor about his torture at the hands of someone he would only refer to as 'the Mad Titan', he had vanished into Harry's room for the night and since then has rarely ventured away from their son. Tony supposes he is making up for lost time - for abandoning Harry again. Or at least that's what the screaming match on the second day had been about - Harry had taken Loki to task for leaving him again before Loki had apologised (Tony *really* hadn't expected that) and promised to never leave like that again.

Tony hadn't been in Harry's room when they'd had that argument, but he had heard parts of it from the penthouse living room. Since then, they have been almost inseparable when Harry hasn't been at school. Tony has had very little time with his son in the past week and it is bothering him. He gets that Harry wants to spend time with Loki now that's he's returned after his sudden departure, but he didn't expect to feel this way - envious and heartsore. He's only known Harry for a few short weeks, but the kid had wormed his way into his heart before they'd even met and had only burrowed deeper since.

He glances up from designs he's not really seeing to watch as Harry makes a cup vanish from the coffee table and materialise in his hand with some strange combination of minute finger movements and flicks of his wrists. He vaguely registers Loki murmuring encouragement but his focus is drawn by the absolute delight on Harry's face. He feels his own mouth twitch with the beginnings of a smile when he catches sight of Loki once more and it flattens into something impassive as he fights the scowl that threatens to appear. He might be allowing Loki to live in the Tower because Harry needs him, but his anger - *so much anger* - has not abated. Loki may have saved Harry from whatever disaster Barton had stirred up, but that does not negate all the wrongs Loki has done. Nor does Loki's extended torture and the evidence Tony has since found to back up his lack of control during the invasion.

"I think that is enough for now, Hávarðr," Loki says quietly, waving a hand and clearing the small amount of mess Harry's attempts at some spells had caused. "You have homework?"

Harry pulls an irritated face and sighs heavily before leaving the room with grumbling under his breath. Alone with Loki, Tony goes back to his tablet and does his best to ignore him. It isn't as easy as he had hoped, especially when he can feel Loki's eyes watching on him. He resists the urge to shift nervously where he's sat and instead makes some adjustments to the coding he's working on. It gets harder when Loki moves closer.

"You are angry with me," Loki comments. Tony snorts but doesn't look up.

"You think?" He says drily.

"Beyond our existing problems. You are angry at me for something else," Loki elaborates, moving to sit down in the chair opposite the sofa. Tony saves his progress and looks up, tired and wanting nothing more than to run away from this confrontation. But this confrontation has been looming on the horizon ever since Thor told him who Tom-Lucas really was and it has to happen at some point. Tony doesn't really know what either one of them can get out of having this confrontation, beyond perhaps clearing the air a little for Harry's sake, but he can't really see how they will ever, *ever* be able to get along properly - not after everything Loki has lied about and hidden. He knows Harry is hoping for the happily ever after that Hollywood and the media advertise, but Tony doesn't think that is possible. Hell, Tony's

barely managing to keep his cool with Loki in the Tower, let alone being a happy family with the man - god - alien - whatever.

“Kid was looking for me, right? But all powerful *mom* comes back and I’m yesterday’s news,” Tony’s answer is tired and more honest than he ever wanted it to be. Loki expression turns guilty as he looks away and out of the window. His fingers seems to twist in his lap anxiously before they still and he places his hands flat on his knees, like some kind of trained reaction. Tony thinks of Thor’s stillness - odd for someone who can be so loud and brash and excitable - and of kings and queens and etiquette and wonders at the kind of upbringing they both had. He wonders whether Loki will teach Harry the same. He hopes not.

“That was never my intention - nor will it have been Hávarðr’s. I did not mean to monopolise his time, but I feared for his magic if I did not teach him more control. I am sorry, Tony,” Loki says quietly.

“Sorry is an easy word to say and I’m not sure it covers everything you’ve done,” Tony snaps, standing to his feet and making to leave the living room. Unfortunately, his path takes him past Loki, whose hand shoots out to grab his wrist. Tony jerks to a halt and just stares down at where Loki’s hand is wrapped around his arm, his grip cool and tight, but not tight to the point of bruising. Tony swallows as he looks at Loki’s hand. It looks like Tom’s - *like Lucas*’. He wonders at that for a moment, but why change something like that when most people notice a face, an expression, a turn of phrase. People don’t notice hands, and yet - Tony looks away.

“Tony, *elskan mín*, please,” Loki says softly. Tony doesn’t know the exact translation of the foreign words the fall from Loki’s silver tongue, but he recognises them as an endearment that appeared often in the security footage JARVIS had of Tom. His hand curls into a fist and he pulls his wrist from Loki’s grip. Surprisingly, he’s allowed to do so.

“*Don’t*,” he says sharply. “Don’t you dare do that. You’re here because of Harry and for no other reason, alright?”

Loki rears back in surprised hurt.

“I *am* sorry,” he repeats. Tony sighs tiredly and shakes his head as he leaves, entering the elevator as JARVIS opens its doors without a request. As the doors close he watches Loki slump back into the armchair, defeated and lost. He almost feels guilty.

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The house elf had burned Bellatrix’s corpse without question, before disposing of the ashes with a quick click of their fingers. Useful creatures, house elves. In the week since, Narcissa has spent a great deal of time thinking over how to approach Lucius - or indeed, even if she should approach him or use alternative means to find out where the other horcruxes are. That her husband has been on a quest to rid the world of the items that she seeks is particularly vexing, but on the positive side, Lucius has *always* been much more efficient than Bellatrix and so she has no doubt that he already has leads on the remaining horcruxes.

She wonders about seducing the information out of him. It has been a while since they have spent a good deal of time together, and whilst she is not unaware of his dalliances on the side

over the years, he has always come back to their marital bed. Perhaps it is time to lure him back with that and then he'll reveal what he knows. Narcissa eyes him over the rim of her teacup. Across the breakfast table he is reading the morning's *Daily Prophet*, completely oblivious to her thoughts and her plans. He seems calm, but she wonders what is really going on inside his head as he drinks his morning coffee. She purses her lips and wonders if veritaserum would get more answers out of him than a night between her thighs. Yes, perhaps that is the way forward. She'll owl her potions supplier after breakfast, before she finalises arrangements for the ball. Then hopefully by the time of the ball, the horcrux will have been found, the ritual enacted and Draco back home and *safe* and *powerful* and *protected*.

Lucius drains the last of his coffee and folds his newspaper neatly before rising from his seat. Narcissa glances up from her bowl of fruit and gives him a loving smile.

"Busy day, darling?" She asks. Lucius nods.

"I have some pressing floo calls to make for the businesses; but it shouldn't take all morning," he answers, stooping to press a kiss to her forehead as he moves past her.

"And Draco? Has your man found him yet?" She presses, her voice full of worry and fear.

"I swear I will tell you the second I know where he is," he replies and she knows immediately that he is lying. His left eyebrow twitches minutely. Thank goodness the Dark Lord never noticed his tell, because surely Lucius' left eyebrow would have been twitching constantly throughout some of the Death Eater meetings. She gives him a tremulous smile and a nod and allows him to leave.

Narcissa allows him five minutes before she follows him, footsteps muffled with a quick spell. Chances are he really is making business calls given how much he has neglected them recently, but the beauty of it is that he must use his public office for floo calls. He'd wanted his private office to be a haven away from *people*, so he had removed it from the floo network. His public office is not nearly so well warded and rarely does he activate the silencing spells. Her other advantage is that he believes her so disinterested in the businesses that he would never think she would come and spy on him. In all their years of marriage, she has never once ventured into either of his offices on her own volition. Once or twice she has called her there, but usually he comes to her.

Narcissa smiles when she sees the door cracked ajar and feels the wards deactivated. She hovers near the door and listens.

*"... any further on solutions to the problem? ... we can't keep him waiting, Severus! Do you not understand the importance of this? Harry Potter is a horcrux and it must be dealt with swiftly and in a way that does not involve injury or death for the boy... what do I care? Well, beyond the obvious, my dear friend, Draco is with the boy and we all know what will happen if Bellatrix finds them! ..."*

Narcissa pulls back and smiles. There is the solution to both of her problems. She walks away quickly and quietly, retreating to her private drawing room and locking the door behind her. She engages the wards that will alert her to Lucius' approach before settling at her desk and beginning to plan. Draco is in New York, this she already knows, but the news that he is

with Harry Potter - who is somehow alive and well, despite the Ministry's announcement to the contrary - comes as a surprise. The last she knew, her son positively *hated* the boy - he wouldn't stop talking about how much he hated Harry Potter. She wonders at what could have happened to cause her son to be with the boy in New York. It is puzzling, to say the least.

Still, if Harry Potter is the horcrux - a powerful wizard her own son's age - she wonders if it would be possible to transfer some of his power as well as that belonging to the horcrux. That *would* be an impressive achievement. It would take more research and more time though, and she did not want to waste anymore time - not when there could be Death Eaters other than Bellatrix out there looking for the Dark Lord's horcruxes, and not to destroy them like Lucius (and Severus, it appeared). No, she will have to settle for enacting the ritual as it is. The Dark Lord's power alone will be enough. After all, he was the most powerful Dark Lord in history.

Briefly, she wonders what will happen to the Potter boy during the ritual. There was nothing in the information she found about living horcruxes - every text seemed to assume that the horcrux was an inanimate object and *not* living. The object would be unsalvageable, according to the information on the ritual; she could only assume that it would be just as damaging if not more to a *living* horcrux. Still, she cares little for the Potter boy, half blood that he is, and her son hates him too. His death would only become true by her actions - everyone else already believes he is dead anyway. She would simply be giving truth to the Ministry's lie.

She summons a house elf and ask it to prepare a travelling trunk for her whilst she visits the town house. All she needs to do is collect the potions and other ribbons for the ritual and the maps she has of New York and she should be ready. It won't be long now until she is reunited with her Draco and can do what she needs to protect him as a mother should.

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Harry sits in the middle of his bed, arms wrapped around his knees as he tries to block out what he had overheard earlier. Draco and Peter are bickering on the floor over the never-ending ending of the *Return of the King* as the credits scrolls up the screen in front of them. After a few minutes more, they shut up and look at him, concern all over their faces. Harry wishes he wasn't so easy to read.

"Um... I... I don't know what happened the other day, because I had to duck out and all for, um, er, *other* things, but its a good thing that Evil Overmom is back now, right?" Peter tries. Harry offers his friend a weak smile.

"I guess," he replies. Draco rolls his eyes and shifts to lie across the bottom of Harry's bed.

"Spit it out, Potter," he demands. "What happened?"

Harry rubs at his temples tiredly.

"Its *Móðir* and Tony, um, dad," he says. "They were fighting."

“But that’s normal, right? Parents fight all the time,” Peter answers, trying to cheer him up, but the situation is anything but normal - not that he would know a normal family if he saw it.

“I don’t know what normal is, but I’m pretty sure most kids don’t have a mum who tricked their dad by pretending to be someone else before vanishing with the baby and then appearing years later as a would-be conqueror,” Harry allows himself to fall forward so he’s lying face down on the bed, his head by Draco’s feet. Draco pokes at him with a foot and Harry slaps him away tiredly.

“But Loki is here,” Draco points out. “And all the information is out in the open too. Didn’t Thor say your father had found evidence to support that Loki wasn’t in control during the invasion?”

“Yeah - something to do with your mom having insanely-crazy blue eyes instead mildly-crazy green ones? And that Hawkeye had the same when he was brainwashed,” Peter adds. Harry smiles weakly at them both.

“I know, but there’s no way dad’s going to forgive *Móðir*, not after everything. And *Móðir* still loves dad,” he says quietly.

“Maybe you should tell your dad that,” Peter suggests.

They fall silent for a little while afterwards, until Peter and Draco start bickering over something else until Peter has to leave and head home for dinner with Aunt May. Draco settles in with his well-worn copy of the Wizarding World’s Norse myths with a brief glance and nod at Harry to make sure he’s okay before starting to read. Harry sits for a while, thinking on what Peter suggested. Maybe he does need to tell his dad that his *Móðir* still loves him. Maybe it would remind his dad of *Lucas* and not of Loki during the invasion or *Tom* and all the lies that followed.

“Hey JARVIS, where’s my dad?” Harry asks timidly, still unsure around the AI, even if he did summon Thor and his dad when Clint was shouting at him.

“He is in his workshop, master Harry,” JARVIS announces. “I believe he would appreciate your company. I think he misses you.”

Harry smiles at JARVIS’ words - his dad *misses* him. His *dad*. With barely a glance in Draco’s direction, he runs out of his room and to the elevator as fast as he can and before long, he’s skidding to a halt in his dad’s workshop, his socks sliding on the smooth floor.

“Hey,” Tony says in greeting, looking up from the screen in front of him. He smiles at Harry and moves around desk he’s working at to clap a hand on Harry’s shoulder and squeeze in affection.

“You finish your homework? Or did Mushu and Intern distract you?” He asks. Harry grins.

“They may have distracted me - but we had to show Draco the last Lord of the Rings! And then he and Peter got into an argument about the never-ending ending. It was pretty funny, dad, and I have all of tomorrow to do my homework anyway,” Harry replies. “And it *is* the weekend.”

His dad returns his grin and shifts so he's looking at a schematic of the Iron Man suit hovering above one of the holographic design tables. He twirls it and pulls something out to expand as Harry watches, fascinated.

"So... no plans for tomorrow then?" Tony asks after a few moments, adjusting something on the right arm of the schematic.

"Other than finishing my homework, no."

His dad looks at him sideways, clearly nervous in a way that has Harry wondering.

"You... uh... you maybe wanna spend some time down here with me? We can pick up where we left off, maybe look at some robotics, or you know, not, if you don't want to and uh-"

"I'd love to," Harry says quickly, before his dad can ramble his way into inadvertently retracting the invitation. He's spent so little time with his dad in the last week since *Móðir* got back, too focussed on making sure he could control his magic so he wouldn't hurt anyone again, but he thinks he's doing okay now, and that maybe one day without a lesson won't matter much. His dad grins at him.

"Movie after dinner as well? You still haven't seen any of the old Cap ones have you? He hates them; it'll be hilarious," he suggests. Harry nods eagerly and perches himself on a nearby stool as his dad continues to work on the newest design of the Iron Man armour. It's a beautiful thing and Harry hopes that one day he'll be able to understand what it is his dad is doing right now. He watches in silence for a while, thinking about his dad and his *Móðir* and what Peter said and decides that maybe he should just go for it - should just put it out there. It can't make it any worse, right? He hopes not.

"Dad?"

"Mhm?" His dad's answer is distracted as he inputs numbers onto the holographic projection and it recalculates something.

"*Móðir* still loves you, you know?"

His dad freezes.

"Harry..." his dad sighs. "Me and your mom - which will never not be weird, by the way - it's complicated and I don't want you to get your hopes up."

"But it's just-"

"Harry, please?"

"Sorry, dad," Harry says quietly. He slides off his stool and heads for the exit, but a hand on his shoulder stops him and pulls him into a hug.

"It's okay, kid," his dad murmurs. "It's okay."

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It's not long past two in the morning when Loki slips into the penthouse living room, aiming for the balcony. He needs some space and some air and some time away with his thoughts to think over his conversation with Tony that morning. On the balcony, with the cold night wind whistling around him, he turns his thoughts inwards.

His apology, even for the smaller infraction of taking up the majority of Hávarðr's time in the last week, was rejected. Tony is colder to him than he has ever been and it is only his fault for deceiving the man on numerous occasions. He knows he could have told Tony during his first stay on Midgard - his appearance is what would have caught Heimdall's and Odin's attention; not his words. He could have told Tony then who he was and that would have solved everything. If he had told Tony and Tony had believed him, then Hávarðr could have grown up with a father who loved him dearly, even if his mother had to leave and never return. He is still not sure that would have been safest though. He still thinks that he was not as careful as he should have been during those months - no doubt he did something that Heimdall and Odin would recognise as his handiwork and then they would have found Tony and Hávarðr.

The invasion, of course, is not his fault - something which Tony has now found proof for, of course. But it does not help that it was still Loki who was the visible antagonist. It is his face that is attached to all the memories of the invasion, whether he was in control of himself or not. He was the one who threw Tony from the very windows just behind him, intending it to be fatal. It makes Loki sick just to think of it. What if the armour had not been ready? He would have woken from the haze of mind control to know he had caused his beloved's death. It gives him nightmares every once in a while; Tony dying at his own hand, having to explain to Hávarðr that he had killed Tony... yes, it was not his fault, but it was still his face, his hands and Tony will not be able to forget that easily.

Since then? His actions as *Tom Larssen* were his own poor judgement and he has no one to blame but himself. His desire to be with Tony outstripped his usually impeccable self-control and he foolishly allowed himself to get involved to an extent that would only cause damage. He should have left it at one night - no, he should never have found Tony in the first place. He should have simply been satisfied to finally, *finally* be with Hávarðr and left it at that - except that Hávarðr was his son with the man he loved *dearly* and Tony was close, so close...

There was too much ground to make up. Too much. Hávarðr wants for things to be right, for them to be a *happy* family, but Loki is not sure that will ever be possible. There is too much between him and Tony for a relationship to be salvageable at this stage. They may be able to parent Hávarðr together with some civility, but Loki does not hope for anything beyond that. Even civility seems like a stretch right now.

Loki stares out at the city before him and sighs deeply, watching his breath mist in front of him and curl upwards. He turns away from the view and heads back inside, aiming to return to Hávarðr's room and assure himself of his son's safety and restful sleep, but he stops when he sees Tony slumped on the sofa, glass of scotch in one hand.

"Harry told me something today," Tony announces, voice low and roughened by the alcohol. He's not quite at the point where he's slurring his words, but Loki recognises the



beginnings of the belligerent drunk Tony can sometimes be. He wishes he still had the right to steal the alcohol from Tony's hand and put him to bed with tender kisses and affection. He doesn't respond to Tony's words, instead just watches as Tony takes another sip of his drink.

"He told me you still love me," Tony says, laughing. It hurts to hear him laugh as he says what is a truth right down to Loki's very core. He *does* love Tony - he has for a long time, by Midgardian standards, and will continue to do so, no matter what happens between them from now onwards.

"He wants us to be a happy little family," Tony continues, his tone bitter, biting at Loki's own wish for such a thing, as impossible as it might seem.

"But that ship sailed, right? I mean, it sailed when you just up and left me all those years ago, leaving behind some bullshit cryptic letter as your explanation. If you loved me, you would have stayed - told me what was going on and let me *help* you. I would have done *anything*. And sure, I would have been surprised to know you were an alien and that you were pregnant, but *Jesus*, Lucas-Loki-whatever you are, if it had been legal then, I would have married you and we would have been looking at adoption anyway!"

Loki inhales sharply at the revelation and wants to cross the distance and kiss Tony like he used to, like there weren't all these years and failures between them. *If it had been legal then, I would have married you.* Loki closes his eyes and tries to keep ahold of himself.

"But no, you *coward*, you ran away instead. And then you turn up trying to conquer Earth? But, no, that's not your fault, you were brainwashed too, just like that asshole Barton, never mind that you killed Coulson and threw me out of my own *fucking* window."

Tony quiets for a moment and takes another sip, before reaching for the decanter on the coffee table and pouring more into his glass. Loki doesn't move, just watches.

"I get it you know, the torture. How it gets to you, so I don't blame you for that. It got to me too," Tony murmurs. "But you throw me out of my window in my dreams over and over again; how am I going to forget that?"

"I dream it too," Loki says hoarsely, honestly, desperately. "Over and over I throw you out of that window, only there is no armour, no clever protection you have created to stop your descent and there is nothing I can do to stop your death."

Tony looks at him, face unreadable as he drinks again.

"Why Tom? Why did you do it again? You must have *known* it wouldn't end well," Tony asks, calm and resigned.

"You were near and I could not resist temptation," Loki replies simply. "My desire for you was greater than my self-control."

"Despite the risks that made you run away all those years ago?" Tony pushed.

“Things are... different now. I know more and the protections I have managed to put in place are stronger than what I would have managed then,” Loki admits. “I left you to protect you and Hávarðr both.”

“But you *left* me. You *left*!” Tony hisses, slamming his glass down on the coffee table and standing up. He wobbles slightly, but manages to find his balance as he glares over at where Loki stands before stalking forwards and shoving Loki’s shoulder ineffectually.

“And now you come back here, expecting what? Huh? Happy families, just like Harry thinks? What, that we’re gonna pick up where we left off and live happily ever after like some Disney fairytale come to life? The Prince and the hero, separated only to find each other again! Really? Is that what you think this will be?” Tony hisses. Loki takes hold of Tony by the arm to steady him when he tries to shove Loki again and instead overbalances.

“I expect nothing of the sort. I only wish for you and Hávarðr to get to know one another and to be family to each other. I have no expectation that what I have done will ever be fixed enough for you and I to resume a relationship. Despite the fact that I am very good at manipulating a situation for my own benefit, I will not do so here. I cannot,” Loki says, his voice cracking ever so slightly. He releases Tony’s arm once the man is steadied and turns to leave but Tony’s hand pulls him back.

“Is what Harry said true?” Tony demands. “Is it true?”

Loki closes his eyes, unwilling to see Tony’s reaction.

“Yes.”

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Loki wakes in a familiar bed, a familiar body pressed up against his side and with the familiar warm huff of air against his neck. He stares at the ceiling for a while, wondering what will happen now and how disastrous this will prove to be for any attempts to at least regain civility. Whilst he was not blind drunk the night before, Tony was not completely sober either, and Loki had known that when Tony had haphazardly and desperately kissed him. He should have gently pushed Tony away and sent him to bed alone, but he was weak, as always when it came to Tony, and now here he was, lying in bed with the man he loved knowing it would not be returned. Last night had been anger and frustration on Tony’s part, no matter how loving it was on Loki’s and the aftermath is not going to be pretty for anyone.

He shifts a little, his body aching in pleasant reminder of the previous night, and Tony makes a little sound of protest, but continues to sleep. Relieved, Loki gently manoeuvres himself out of Tony’s grip and dresses himself with a flick of his fingers and a greenish-gold wisp of magic. He stands and pauses before leaving, bending at the waist to press a gentle, tender kiss to Tony’s forehead.

“I love you, *elskan mín*.”

## **Chapter 20: On Kidnapping and a Mother's Love**

“Whatever happened between your parents late last night has made things worse,” Draco comments as they travel down in the elevator. Harry cringes as he remembers breakfast and how *awkward* it had been. It had been silent, except for when either Harry or Draco attempted to strike up a conversation, but all their attempts fell pathetically flat in the face of his *Móðir* and his dad giving each other mournful (Loki) and angry (Tony) looks. His dad had downed several cups of coffee in between angry glances before slamming out of the kitchen and heading down to the workshop. Harry had asked JARVIS about going down to see his dad, like they had originally planned, but the workshop was on lockdown and no one was allowed access. So much for that plan.

Instead, he had done two hours worth of meditating and basic spells with his *Móðir*, before deciding that perhaps going round to Peter’s was better than the cold, angry atmosphere of the Tower. Draco had agreed and after getting permission from Loki, they had made their escape.

“Did you say something?” Draco asks, curious. The doors to the elevator open and they step out into the ground floor foyer of the Tower. It’s Sunday, so the usual hustle and bustle of the place is non-existent. The weekend receptionist sits at her desk playing spider solitaire and the two security guards nod at them in turn as they leave through glass doors and exit onto the street.

“I talked to my dad,” Harry admits with a grimace. “Told him that *Móðir* still loves him.”

“What did your father say?”

Harry is silent for a while as they walk. His dad’s reaction hadn’t been that unexpected, but he had hoped for something a little more... positive. He thinks maybe he’s pinning too many hopes on his parents and their relationship. At least he *has* parents, he supposes - and six months ago he still believed he was an orphan.

“He said it’s complicated. He doesn’t want me to get my hopes up,” Harry answers eventually. “But I just don’t get it. *Móðir* loves him and I’m pretty sure that dad still loves *Móðir* so why can’t they just make up already?”

“I think relationships are a little more complicated than that, Potter,” Draco says, more gently than Harry’s ever heard him speak. Harry stops walking and sighs heavily when Draco comes to a stop next to him.

“I know. I just... I’ve never had family before, you know? Not a real family and I guess dad’s right. I let my hopes get away from me. I guess I’ll just have to settle for this.”

Draco rolls his eyes and smirks.

“So melodramatic, Potter, honestly,” he quips. “Now hurry up. Parker said he had that old film *Space Fights* to show us.”

“It’s *Star Wars*, Draco,” Harry corrects with a smile as they start walking again. They’re almost at the subway stop, bickering and teasing all the way, when someone calls out to them, over the noise of the New York street.

“*Draco!*”

Draco’s brow furrows as he turns around, unsure who would be calling him in the middle of a city where the only people who know him live in the Tower they have just left. Harry, several inches shorter than Draco, struggles to see through the crowds, but whoever it is, Draco’s expression pinches in some strange combination of fear and resignation at the sight of them. Not long after, a whirl of blond hair and perfume confronts them.

“Draco! Thank goodness I’ve finally found you!” Mrs Malfoy sobs. “I couldn’t believe it when the school told me - that you’d disappeared and they had no idea where you’d gone. Oh, I can’t believe I’ve finally found you! Are you alright? Tell me you’re alright!”

It’s a bigger display of emotion than Harry ever thought he’d see from a Malfoy, but Draco’s mum is almost crying right there on the streets of New York as she clutches her son close to her, pulling him into a tight embrace and scolding him for not telling them where he was and for doing something so foolish.

“Something could have happened to you! Some mad muggle could have killed you, or some wizard kidnapped you for ransom! I’ve been so worried, Draco darling,” she continues. “But I shall worry no longer - I have a solution.”

Draco extricates himself from his mother’s grasp and folds his arms petulantly across his middle.

“Mother, I am sorry for worrying you, but I’m absolutely fine. I’ve been staying with a friend,” he explains shortly, gesturing at Harry. Harry decides he’s never going to let Draco live it down - not now that he’s *finally* referred to Harry as his *friend*. He almost laughs, but catches himself before he interrupts the mother-son reunion.

“Your father and I will be having words with you about running away from school and how irresponsible you have been. However, in the mean time, I have a way of making sure you will never be vulnerable again.”

“What are you talking about mother? I’m perfectly capable of defending myself. I’m almost an adult and I’ve started learning wandless magic,” Draco snaps. Harry looks between his friend and Mrs Malfoy, noticing how her eyes narrow and her distraught expression flickers briefly into something calculating. He doesn’t like it. It sets his nerves on edge and he reaches to grip Draco’s arm and get his attention, but Draco is too engrossed in his growing disagreement with his mother.

“Darling, I have only ever wanted to protect you,” Mrs Malfoy protests. Draco laughs meanly.

“By smothering me? By making me go to a school that didn’t challenge me? By making sure everything I did was *safe*?”

Harry thinks he’d never speak to his *Móðir* in that way, but his relationship with his *Móðir* is new and fragile and he knows nothing about Draco’s own relationship with his parents - only that they are overprotective. Harry wonders what the difference is between the Malfoy’s overprotectiveness and his *Móðir*’s.

“I want the best for you and for you to be safe,” Mrs Malfoy says, suddenly cool and calm. Her right hand twitches, Harry notices. He thinks he can see the tip of her wand poking out from the edge of her sleeve. She must be wearing a wand-holster on her forearm. He closes his eyes briefly and tries to centre himself. His magic flickers quietly in response.

“But you’re smothering me!” Draco snaps. “You’re controlling me too much, mother.”

“I always knew this day would come,” she murmurs, almost sadly. “That’s why I’ve prepared for it. Don’t worry, darling, you’ll be just fine.”

Draco’s mouth drops open - presumably to ask what the hell his mother is going on about - but before he can get a word out, she has her wand in her hand and is firing a spell in their direction. Harry flings out a hand, desperately willing his magic to do what he wants and to protect them for once and it works, forming a barrier between them and the spell, kind of like a *protego*, and Mrs Malfoy’s spell just dissipates ineffectively.

“In broad daylight, mother? Are you *mad*?” Draco hisses, gesturing at the muggles around them. Some of them seem to have their phones out, filming the altercation. He makes no move to get his own wand and Harry suddenly realises that he must have left it back at the Tower, assuming he wouldn’t need it. Mrs Malfoy doesn’t reply, instead snarling and turning on Harry, shooting several spells rapidly. Harry barely manages to deflect the first two, before the third catches him on the arm, slicing through his coat and cutting his forearm. The crowd around them are murmuring; he hears someone mention calling the police and someone is shouting, calling his name but Mrs Malfoy is casting again and then everything goes dark.

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Lucius searches the relevant shelves in the Malfoy family library with growing concern when he cannot find the book he is looking for. Draco had given several to Loki, this he is aware of, but the other one - the one Lucius needs but cannot find - was not amongst those, nor is it listed in the ledger as having been removed from the library. The ledger had been enchanted by his great grandmother, who had spent years putting the collection together. She was - much to the rest of the family’s horror - a Ravenclaw and loved books beyond all other items and artefacts. The spells for the ledger had been his great grandmother’s creation - tied to the wards and each individual book, the ledger would record without fail whenever a book was removed from the room and then also when it was returned as well. It also knows where each of the books are kept within the library itself - handy for quickly finding what you need when you need it. The ledger has never failed - indeed, the books Draco had liberated and loaned to Loki are listed in there - until now.

The house elves, when he calls them, know nothing. They have simply continued to dust and clean in the library as scheduled and have no interest in either reading or removing the books in there. The ledger lists the book as being on this particular shelf between these two particular books and yet it is not there. Lucius studies the other shelves around where the book should be, but finds nothing. He even tries to *accio* the book but the spell fails him. As a last resort, he calls Severus and Sirius over, hoping one of them might be able to work some spell and find the book, but neither know anything more that might help.

“What do you need this book for, Lucius?” Severus asks, frowning as he flicks through the ledger. Across the room, Sirius is studying the shelf where it is supposed to be. Every now and then he casts a few spells, though apparently without any positive results.

“I had thought it might have some ancient ritual or spell that might help with his highness’ problem,” Lucius admits, barely managing to keep from wringing his hands in anxiety. “But the rituals in it - many of them are dangerous and dark. The fact that it is missing...”

There is a brief uncomfortable silence between them before Sirius speaks up.

“Bellatrix,” he says. “You were thinking it - I’m just saying it.”

Lucius frowns and shakes his head.

“I would know if she had been in the Manor. The wards would tell me, though I am sure her particular brand of wanton destruction would let us know before that,” he answers.

“But Narcissa - she could have let her in?” Sirius suggest. Lucius shakes his head vehemently.

“No, Narcissa wouldn’t do such a thing. I had considered her involvement in Bellatrix’s escape, but Narcissa would never want her sister near Draco. She is far too protective of him. And again, the wards would tell me.”

“It’s been confunded,” Severus announces from behind him. Lucius whirls immediately and joins his friend by the ledger just as he undoes the *confundus*. The words on the page twists and shimmer before them and a new entry writes itself in - the book they have been looking for, taken out *months* ago by Narcissa.

*Narcissa?*

Lucius calls for his wife’s personal house elf and immediately begins questioning the quivering, terrified creature.

“Trixie is knowing nothing about Mistress’ books, Master,” she says, her voice trembling.

“Where is my wife, Trixie?” Lucius demands, towering over the elf.

“Mistress is not being in the Manor. Mistress is being at the Townhouse.”

*What?*

“What for?” Severus questions, clearly as confused about it as Lucius. Narcissa *hates* the Townhouse.

“Mistress is working on a special project and Trixie is being forbidden to talk about it. Trixie is sorry Master. Trixie will be ironing her ears after dinner is being ready,” the house elf cries. Lucius turns away from her in disgust, rolling his eyes at the overdramatic antics. He ushers the others in the direction of the floo room and in minutes they are in the Townhouse, Lucius shouting for Narcissa. The house is silent, save for the one house elf who cares for

the property when they are not there, and Narcissa is nowhere to be found. The door to her personal rooms is warded heavily and it takes all three of them to remove the wards and gain entry. An atlas lies open on one surface, a map of the United States glaring out at them. Severus snatches up the potion vial next to it and sniffs deeply before swiping a finger around the rim and then licking it.

“Tracking potion,” he says, eying the map. “No doubt she was looking for Draco.”

“New York,” Lucius murmurs, studying the page. “I thought she had taken my reassurances too well.”

“Uh... Basilisk venom? Phoenix tears? I may not be an expert in potions like Snape, but I’m pretty sure at least one of those is illegal and both are hard to get hold of. What would she be brewing with those?” Sirius asks, waving a piece of parchment about. Severus takes the parchment from Sirius and reads it.

“There are ingredients for several potions here - a lot of them are dangerous and expensive, not just the Basilisk venom. And... silk bonding ribbons?”

“She must be doing a ritual from the book,” Lucius reasons. “To Draco. She must be doing it to Draco. We’ve got to find him before she does!”

“What about Harry? Just because your son *might* be in danger you’re going to stop looking for a way to help Harry get the bloody horcrux out of him?” Sirius snaps, moving to stand in Lucius’ way. Lucius glares at the other man.

“You are an imbecile, Black,” he says, disdain dripping from every word. He knows Severus is smirking right behind him. “Draco is with Harry in New York, or had you forgotten?”

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Tony leaves his workshop just after two o’clock. After a morning of working on various projects - and even some paperwork Pepper had left on his desk (probably a few weeks ago) - he feels a lot calmer than he had when he had woken *alone* that morning.

He isn’t sure why he is upset that he woke alone. Its not as though last night was anything other than a drunken mistake on his part. He was drunk, upset, angry and struggling with confusion over his feelings for Lucas/Tom/Loki. Loki had been there, had admitted he still loved him, and then hadn’t pushed him away. His hazy memories assure him it was worth it, albeit angry and rough and having left more than a couple of bruises. He is sore - *pleasantly so (though he will never admit it)* - and tired and slightly hungover and seeing Loki at breakfast, looking calm and collected and unaffected had just made him angry all over again.

If Loki loved him, how in the hell could he sit there looking like that? Like nothing had passed between them? Like this was normal? Like they didn’t share a son, like he hadn’t *lied* to Tony for all those years, like he hadn’t pretended to be two other people, like he hadn’t thrown Tony out of the goddamn window?

So he had gone down to his workshop to drown himself in some projects and try to work away his anger and it had worked, to a degree. He regrets leaving without acknowledging

Harry and the decision they'd made to spend some time together in the workshop today. He figures he'll find himself some lunch, then find his kid and take him down to the workshop for an afternoon of Science. And if he drag Bruce out from his own lab, perhaps it'll be even more fun for the kid.

When he arrives in the penthouse, Harry is nowhere to be seen. Instead, he sees Loki lounging on the sofa in a dark green shirt and black jeans, his dark hair tousled and falling in his face as he studies the book on his lap. Tony halts and watches for a few moments as Loki swipes at the hair in his face, fruitlessly attempting to push it out of the way. Tony's throat closes up at the picture it presents and he takes a single step forward before the anger comes rushing back and he changes his mind.

"Where's Harry?" He demands, tone sharp and cutting. Loki looks up from his book and lifts a single curious eyebrow.

"You're not going to take out your anger on him now, are you?" He asks, calm and collected, just like he had been that morning. "Because whatever you feel about me, Hávarðr is not to blame."

Tony scowls.

"I know that," he snaps. "So where is he? We were going to spend time in the workshop this afternoon."

"He and Draco have gone to Peter's for the afternoon. I believe they said something about leaving the awkward atmosphere behind - not that they know I heard them," Loki replies, going back to his book and turning a page. Tony watches him pause and make notes on a pad of paper next to him.

"JARVIS can make notes for you," Tony says automatically, without really thinking about it.

"I have already tried, Sir, but Master Loki refused, saying he preferred to use paper and pen, as he always has, if you recall," JARVIS says. Tony watches Loki's lips quirk up in a soft smile for a moment.

"Your assistance is always appreciated, my dear JARVIS. Please do not feel offended by my preferences," Loki replies.

"I remain unoffended, Master Loki, as I was before. However, if your preferences include continuing to deceive Sir, I may begin to take offence."

"Your warning is noted."

Tony scowls.

"JARVIS, what did we say about fraternising with the enemy?"

"My apologies, Sir, but I am given to understand that Master Loki is Master Lucas, so he has full user rights and privileges. Did you wish me to correct this?"



Tony winces when Loki's gaze falls on him, sharp and intelligent.

"You never changed that after I left?" He says softly. "You did not remove me from the system?"

Tony turns his head so he doesn't have to keep looking at Loki's soft, *sentimental* gaze. It hurts to see that much emotion - that much *love* - in his eyes, eyes belonging to someone he has loved, lost, and been betrayed by.

"I never stopped loving Lucas," Tony admits hoarsely. He hears Loki move closer and then there the familiar touch of a long-fingered hand on his arm, gentle and careful, loving.

"*Dear heart*," Loki breathes, voice full of hope and love. Tony feels sick at the feeling of love he recognises in his own chest. He pushes down on it ruthlessly and focuses on his anger instead.

"But you're not Lucas, are you?" He sneers, pushing Loki's hand off his arm and glaring up at him. Loki's face falls and for a moment Tony thinks he has made the god of mischief cry, but anger flares across Loki's features and he snarls.

"Apart from my name and my species, everything I gave you as Lucas was me - *only* me! There was no deception or ruse there. I may have encountered you in my other forms - sought you out even, but I never expected to see you as Lucas," Loki hisses.

"Excuse me? Sought me out? What the hell? Are you saying you *stalked* me? As different people?" Tony stumbles backwards and away from Loki, a small amount of fear joining the anger already burning in his chest. Loki's face turns ashen and he moves backwards himself. He appears to shrink in on himself a little, guilt in his features and on his shoulders as he avoids Tony's glare.

"I... you were fascinating," he says, but his voice is weak. "All you would give me was one night, but I wanted more than that - more than just carnal pleasures. I never expected to see you as Lucas - that was my everyday form when I was on Midgard; he was nothing spectacular that would catch your eye. He was made to blend in, not stand out."

"I don't care. I don't. Really. I don't know what to think anymore. I don't know, Loki. This is... *beyond* even... just *beyond*. I can't..." Tony falls silent, unable to articulate his thoughts and feelings. It's just one more *lie* on top of everything else and maybe after last night he had wondered whether they could *eventually* make something of this, but now he isn't sure anymore. He doesn't even know how they can begin to mend this. Certainly not with sex. He's about to speak, to tell Loki how he isn't sure they can ever fix things, when the doors to the elevator hiss open and Clint stumbles out, breathless and panicking.

"Harry," he wheezes. "Harry and the blonde kid - kidnapped!"

"*What?!*" Loki thunders, leaping over the back of the sofa and advancing on Clint. Tony isn't far behind, but pushes past Loki to grab hold of Clint, before the god does, and he pushes him against the wall next to the elevator doors.

“You’ve gotta a lot of nerve, Barton,” Tony snaps. “Did you do this? Is this because of you running and squealing to SHIELD?”

Clint clutches at Tony’s hand where its dragging on his shirt and making it tight around his throat and Tony eases off a little.

“No, no man, I would never,” Clint says, eyes darting warily between Tony and Loki, who is hovering behind him. Tony can feel the fear and anger and menace emanating from Loki, like an aura that begins to fill the room dangerously.

“What happened?” Tony demands. “Where’s my kid, Barton?”

“No idea where,” Clint says, catching his breath. “Was coming back here - to apologise, you know, for what I did; I’m so sorry, man, that was really, really inappropriate and unfair and-”

“Stay on topic, Hawkass,” Tony orders.

“Right, I was coming back here and I saw them in the middle of the street talking to this woman - she looked like the blonde kid - when she pulled out this sticks and started shooting lights at them. Harry tried, I think, but then she did something that knocked them both out, grabbed them, then vanished into thin air,” Clint finished.

“And you did nothing?” Loki seethes. Clint’s gaze snaps over to him.

“I tried to get to them, to help, but I didn’t have my bow and there were loads of people stopping. I’m sorry, Tony,” Clint says, looking back at him.

“JARVIS, footage? Someone must have recorded this,” Tony lets go of Clint and moves across to where JARVIS has activated a holoscreen. The other follow and they stand together and watch as a woman who looks like Draco shoots what can only be *spells* at them, before knocking them out and kidnapping them.

“Fucking magic,” Tony mutters. “JARVIS, any kind of evidence? Any reports to the NYPD or SHIELD?”

“Nothing so far, sir,” JARVIS responds. “Though there are two people in the lobby who are demanded to see Master Loki. They are saying that Master Draco is in danger.”

Security footage from the lobby appears on the screen to show two men, all dressed rather strangely, arguing with the poor weekend receptionist who is looking increasingly nervous.

“Draco’s father,” Loki murmurs from next to him, pointing with one long finger one of the men who is currently trying to charm the receptionist, Tony thinks.

“JARVIS, let them up - and quickly. Don’t worry about the security stuff. If anything happens, Pinocchio here can take them,” Tony says, avoiding looking at Loki. “And get the other Avengers too.”

“The gentleman are in the elevator, Sir. However, the other Avengers appear to be out at this present moment. I shall message them to return as soon as possible.”

Tony doesn't respond, but starts watching the footage of the kidnapping over and over again, looking for any possible clue or pattern. Loki watches with him for a short while, before beginning to pace up and down behind him. Clint has another holoscreen up and is zooming in on different moments of the video, analysing it like only a SHIELD agent can.

When the elevator doors open to admit the two men - all of whom look very confused and stunned - Loki charges across the floor, murder in his expression.

"What have you done?" He hisses. "I entrusted this research to you in good faith. Or is perhaps your name indicative of your nature, hmm?"

The blonde man, who looks so much like Draco, almost falls over himself to bow to Loki. Another man appears out of thin air, folding a piece of fabric over his arm and if it weren't for the situation, Tony would be demanding an explanation and to examine what he can only assume is an invisibility device of sorts. The two men watch Loki and the blonde warily but make no such move.

"Your highness, I promise, I have told no one," the blonde man says, voice shaking slightly. "We here because Draco is in danger."

"Oh really? I had no idea, given that he has just been kidnapped along with my own son," Loki snaps. "What do you know of it, Lucius?"

"Kidnapped?" The blonde - Lucius - utters, face paling even whiter than it appears to be naturally.

"Yep," Tony interrupts, popping the 'p'. "Got it right here, if you don't believe us."

The men move warily through the room, eyeing the surroundings cautiously and with confusion, before stopping by the holoscreen. One of them - the dark haired man with the beard - reaches out as if to touch it, but pulls his hand back quickly.

"What is it?" He whispers. "Magic?"

"Did you complete Auror training, Black? Or have you conveniently forgotten the laws surrounding the Statute of Secrecy?" The other dark haired man hisses. Tony snorts.

"Oh, that ship sailed when Tall, Blonde and Pointy put out a fire with his magic stick," Tony says. "Can we get to the point, please? I want to find out where my son is, so I can go get him before anything else happens?"

He starts the video and whilst they're focused on it, Tony watches their faces for reactions. They recognise the woman, that much is clear.

"Narcissa," Lucius says. "I was right."

"Your wife, Lucius? Is this not just her finding your wayward son? Though why would she see fit to take Hávarðr also?" Loki questions. Tony folds his arm across his chest and glares at the man.

“Do tell,” he adds.

“She has taken a book on rituals - dark and dangerous ones. I believe she means to perform one on Draco as a means of protection. I do not know what she could want the Potter boy for, though.”

“Stark,” Tony mutters under his breath. “He’s a Stark.”

Black’s eyes narrow.

“Harry is and always will be a Potter. James and Lily loved him and gave their lives for him. Where were you?” Black snaps. Tony was already on the edge from his argument with Loki and then the kidnapping only added to it - this? Being questioned by some magical idiot who he doesn’t even know? Tony offers the man a harsh smile before his fist shoots out and he punches the man on the nose. He would have followed through with more, but arms are around him, dragging him backwards from Black who is clutching his nose and swearing. Clint has hold of him by one arm and Loki has him around the waist as they haul him away.

“I didn’t even know about him! Any choice I had to be a parent was taken away from me, so don’t you dare stand there and accuse me when you don’t even know me!” Tony shouts, straining at the arms holding him.

“Oh,” the other dark haired man says rather suddenly. All eyes turn on him and for a moment he looks frustrated and furious before he turns thoughtful.

“Lucius, the book - it is usually located with the other books on soul magic in your library, yes?” He asks.

“Well yes, Severus. The majority of the rituals contained in it are about the soul, after all,” Lucius explains. Tony watches as something passes between the two and feels Loki’s arms stiffen where they are around his waist.

“The horcrux,” Loki says, darkly. “She is after the horcrux.”

“Your highness-” Lucius tries.

“No. If she harms a single hair on Hávarðr’s head, she will wish she had never been born.”

Tony shivers at the threat. No one could say that Loki did not love their son.

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Narcissa finishes casting the wards around the largest room of the abandoned house she had found before turning to the two unconscious boys lying on the floor. Her Draco looks so peaceful and calm and lovely. She smiles at the sight of him, sighing in relief as she thinks of what she will finally accomplish today, after many months of planning. Soon he will be safe and strong and powerful and no one will ever be able to hurt him again. He will be great - greater than any other wizard - and no one will be able to stop him. She hums in satisfaction at the thought and flicks her wand to levitate the boys from the floor to the sofa, manoeuvring

them and immobilising them so they are sitting facing one another. After a brief consultation of the instructions in the book, she collects the first potion - the one to weaken the bond between the soul fragment and the object - and casts the spell to wake the two boys. The Potter boy is the first to come round, his eyes flickering around the room, wide and fearful. Draco wakes moments later, confused and concerned before he looks at her, shocked.

“Don’t worry, darling,” she says soothingly. “Mummy has it all under control.”

Narcissa grips the Potter boy by the chin, forcing his mouth open and pours the potion down his throat. He moans and chokes a little, but the potion slides down with no hindrance. A few minutes later, it starts and the skin on his arms begins to move, like something is shifting underneath, slithering up his arms and then appearing on his neck and then heading across his face to where his scar is. He groans in pain and Narcissa watches in fascination as his forehead begins to bulge where his scar is, as though something is trying to push its way out. A scream rips from him, loud and long and pained and she laughs in delight. Everything is going *swimmingly*. Soon, her Draco will get what he deserves.

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Whilst the others argue about how to find the boys, Loki’s right forearm begins to itch. *Hávarðr*.

## **Chapter 21: On Rescues and Riddles**

His arms are bound to Draco’s, palm to wrist, the silk ribbons wound tight enough to almost cut off the blood flow. He watches, through the haze of pain and confusion, as Mrs Malfoy forces a dark, foul-smelling potion down Draco’s throat, ignoring the fear in her son’s eyes, all the while insisting that she knows best, that it will be alright. Harry bleakly wonders if she’s as insane as her sister is. Even under the *immobulus* Draco seems to choke and gag, his body trying to convulse and get rid of what has just been forced inside him, but to no avail.

His forehead - his *scar* - pounds with what is probably the worst headache he has *ever* had. It feels like something is trying to escape through the scar. If he wasn’t wracked with pain and unable to move, maybe he would do something, but he is helpless, helpless to save Draco from whatever plan his (apparently insane) mother has. He can only wish and hope that his *Móðir* and his dad will find them - surely they know they’re missing by now? And didn’t his *Móðir* say something about a rune that told him when Harry was in danger?

She is chanting now, something low and complicated in latin that he can’t quite make out, and he feels the tingle of magic on his skin, pleasant and soothing at first, until it seems to burrow into him, like claws hooking into his flesh. His scar begins to pull and stretch, those invisible talons taking hold of whatever is trying to escape and pulling pulling *pulling* as Mrs Malfoy begins to chant louder and faster, repeating the words over and over. The skin of Draco’s wrist where they meet his palms begins to warm, slowly at first then suddenly burning hot and Harry screams at the searing pain. Even under the *immobulus* his body is shaking, convulsing as whatever is going on with his scar suddenly shoots down into his arms, then his hands and finally his fingertips which suddenly seem fused to Draco’s burning wrists. He thinks Draco is screaming too and wishes, somewhere in the back of his mind, where there is no pain and no torment and no confusion, that he could help his friend, that he

could be the saviour just that one more time and stop this from happening, but he is helpless and has no idea what to do but scream and scream and *scream* and *SCREAM*...

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Loki would have just teleported away on his own to save Hávarðr, but for the iron grip on his wrist. Almost as soon as he had mouthed Hávarðr's name upon feeling the itch of the runes, Tony's hand, encased in the Iron Man gauntlet, had grabbed him by the wrist and squeezed tightly. He'd recognised the look on Loki's face - the one that said he knew something and was going to disappear without further notice in order to deal with it. Tony's touch had stopped him and Loki knows it is important that he allows Hávarðr's father to help in this circumstance. He knows Tony would never want to be left sitting at home, waiting to hear and find out what had happened. As much as he wishes he could protect Tony and keep him away from whatever danger this mortal witch presents, he cannot - especially not if he wishes to begin to mend his relationship with Tony (if that is even possible anymore).

He requests a map from JARVIS instead and tries to translate the itching, pulling sensation in his arm to a location on the map before him. It is difficult, combining Midgardian technology, aeons behind the Asgardian equivalents, with his magic, and eventually he has to give up and demand a physical copy of the map instead. It takes a short while to print one, and Loki is impatient, worried about Hávarðr and what could be happening to their precious son. The itch in his forearm never abates, meaning that Hávarðr is still in danger and probably in pain and he wants to *just go*. But he waits and he works his magic with the map when Tony spreads it across the table and soon they have their location.

"Bed-Stuy? Really?" Tony says, glaring over at Barton. Barton lifts up both hands and shrugs.

"Don't look at me. I moved in here, remember? And I have *nothing* to do with this - its all Blondie's wife."

Lucius bristles at Barton's words, a retort ready on his lips and Loki steps in to stop any further arguments and delays. Hávarðr *must* be found soon, or who knows what will happen? Especially if Narcissa is after the horcrux.

"Enough," he commands, low and threatening. "We do not have time for this. Now we have a location, I will transport us there. But know this - if *any* of you see fit to harm Hávarðr, you will not see the sun set this night."

He instructs them to grip one another by the arms, but Tony steps in to stop Barton from accompanying them - something about not wanting to scare Hávarðr. Barton agrees after a little resistance and instead decides to wait for the other Avengers to return to the Tower and get them ready to provide back-up if necessary. With those arrangements made, Loki asks Tony to remove one of his suit gauntlets in preparation for the teleportation. The metal around Tony's right hand retracts smoothly and Loki takes Tony's hand in his own. The warmth of it is reassuring and soothing, even as he worries and fears for their son. Unable to resist, he gently squeezes Tony's hand and moves his thumb in a soothing circle, before focusing on the spell to transport them all. Just as he is ready to cast, he feels an answering squeeze. He breathes in deeply and closes his eyes.

When he opens them again, they are in an alley strewn with litter and half-eaten food. He thinks he can hear rats nearby and unsurprisingly, Lucius and Severus' noses are wrinkling in disgust. He thinks Lucius is muttering to his friend about Narcissa's choice of location, but he has little desire to focus on that when his son is in danger. He wonders whether Lucius is deliberately focusing on it to stop worrying about his own son. Ignoring the wizards, he walks to the end of the alley with Tony and together they examine the street they've ended up on. Most of the houses seem run down but inhabited and nothing looks suspicious or out of place.

Loki focuses on the pull from the runes in his wrist and his eyes shift along the houses until he picks one out. It looks no different than the rest, but as they walk up to it, Loki can feel the presence of mortal magic. He forces the others to stand a little behind him as he raises his hands and feels for the wards Narcissa has put in place. His heart pounds in his chest as he realises Hávarðr is so near. All he wants to do is tear through the wards and rush to his son, but dismantling wards should never be done in a hurry - even if they are made by Midgardian Wizards and pose no trouble to him. Taking the time to unravel them is important - especially when Tony is with him, a mortal with no magic who might very well come to severe harm if Loki does not take the time to disable the wards properly. And of course, this will give them the element of surprise.

After a few minutes of studying the wards, he unravels them with ease, the twist of his fingers cutting through the threads of magic as though he wielded a newly sharpened blade. The magic surrounding the house gives a soft sigh as the wards dissipate and he motions the others forwards, casting a silencing spell on each of them to mask their footsteps and the heavy sounds of Tony's Iron Man suit.

Of course, the element of surprise does not matter in the end, because as soon as they enter the house Loki hears the screams of Draco and of Hávarðr and any kind of plan he may have formed vanishes in an urgent need to get to Hávarðr as soon as he can. He runs through the house towards the sound of screaming, the others on his tail and blasts away the doors between him and his son to find himself in a dirty room, empty save for the sofa on which the two boys are sitting, bound together and screaming, shaking and convulsing, despite the immobilising spell Loki can sense. Narcissa stands behind the sofa, her wand raised and chanting words rapidly and loudly, her gaze focussed on the place where the boy's hands are joined. Loki wants to immediately step in and rip them apart from each other, but knows it would be worse if he did. Rituals, even ones created by Midgardian wizards, are dangerous if interrupted and he has no idea what Narcissa is trying to do, only that involves the horcrux that has been living like a parasite inside Hávarðr.

"Harry!" Tony shouts from next to Loki, the Iron Man helmet folding back. He tries to move forwards, but Loki stops him with an arm.

"No, we mustn't!" He says sharply.

"What the hell, Loki? That's our son!" Tony shouts.

"No, if we interrupt the ritual without knowing what its doing it could make things worse!"

"I don't see how it could be worse! Look at him!"

Loki tears his eyes from Hávarðr and turns to face Tony, honest and open and wishing he could do nothing more than take Hávarðr and Tony away from here to somewhere safe.

“I know I have given you no reason to, but you *must* trust me if we are to have any hope of Hávarðr surviving this. We *cannot* interrupt. It would likely kill him.”

“*This* is killing him,” Tony points out harshly.

“He is strong, Tony. He is strong and far more durable than a normal human or Midgardian wizard. Please, *please* trust me.”

Tony eyes him for a moment and opens his mouth to speak, but the screaming stops suddenly and they whirl around to see Narcissa casting a spell to slice the ribbons binding the two boys together. Almost immediately, Hávarðr falls sideways off the sofa, eyes rolling back in his head. Loki darts forwards and catches his son before he hits the floor, simultaneously casting a spell to bind Narcissa where she stands. She freezes where she is hovering over Draco, but Loki turns his attention to Hávarðr, eyes sweeping over his prone form. Loki hears the sound of the Iron Man suit disengaging and Tony’s footsteps on the wooden floor as he hurries to join him, but he focuses on his son. Hávarðr’s scar is red and inflamed, bleeding just a little around the edges, but it is his hands and wrists that worry Loki the most. They are burned, the skin bright red and blistered in places, blackened in others. The tips of his fingers are burned almost down to the bone and Loki fights the urge to vomit when he sees them.

“What have you done, Narcissa?” Lucius is demanding from somewhere in the room.

“*Silence!*” Loki hisses, before Narcissa can respond. He cannot have the distraction of their domestic spat - not when Hávarðr is in pain and unconscious and they have no real idea what this witch has done to him beyond the superficial. What Loki really needs to do is examine Hávarðr’s magical core, but even as he tries to focus and draw out the image, the residual ritual magic distracts him. The air around them tastes sour and bitter and the malevolence of the horcrux’s presence is stronger than usual.

“I cannot check him here,” he says, frustrated. Tony looks at him, worried.

“Can we move him? Will it hurt him if we do?”

“We have no other option,” Loki answers. “But he should be fine.”

Loki glances across the room to see Lucius hovering over Draco, who is also unconscious, but now lying apparently comfortably on the sofa. Narcissa, still frozen, is spitting invectives at her husband at an alarming rate.

“You will not interrupt or stop it, Lucius,” she hisses. “The ritual will finish and then Draco will be *safe*. Safe and powerful and no one will *ever* be able to harm him again.”

“What have you *done*?” Lucius repeats, eyes flashing as he holds out his wand and takes a step closer to his wife. She snarls.



“Given him more power than you ever could! You would let him end up like you - with only the facade of real power and never anything real to be proud of. My boy is a Black and a Malfoy and he is meant to be more than you could ever give him!”

“What ritual, Narcissa? What have you done to my son? I will *not* ask you again,” Lucius shouts.

Narcissa smiles and it is as terrifying as it is beautiful.

“It took a while to find, but the ritual allows for the transference of magical power from a horcrux to a person, *without* transferring the soul fragment as well,” She explains briefly.

“Bellatrix’s escape was *you*,” Sirius interjects, drawing level with Lucius, his own wand out. Narcissa laughs wildly.

“Of course it was *me*,” she admits. “She was the perfect cover and knew exactly where the Dark Lord’s horcruxes were hidden. I enticed her with the opportunity to resurrect her precious Dark Lord and she did all the work from there. I would have completed this sooner, if you hadn’t suddenly grown a conscience and gone to Dumbledore, Lucius.”

“I was protecting our family from the Dark Lord’s return!”

“And yet earlier this year, you happily went off to your little Death Eater reunion.”

“I did not want-”

“Of *course* you didn’t, *darling*. But you are useless when it comes to this sort of thing, so I decided to do it myself. And I have done it! I have protect Draco and given him power beyond anything else. He will be the most powerful wizard - others will quake before him and none will be able to harm him.”

“So you thought you’d use the Boy Who Lived? *My* godson?” Sirius says angrily.

“I had no other leads on the horcruxes, not with dear Bella dead and buried, but my darling husband forgot to close the door whilst he had a floo conversation and in a stroke of rather serendipitous luck, I discover that the Boy Who Lived, the *Saviour*, is a horcrux as well and is with Draco in New York. It matters little to me whether he lives or dies - if he dies it is one less wizard to challenge my dear Draco. Nothing matters but Draco’s safety.”

Loki snarls.

“You insolent, foolish, wretched witch!” He snaps. “How *dare* you presume to steal my son from me?”

Loki gently transfers Hávarðr to Tony’s care and stands as he faces Narcissa. She watches him with mild interest, her face serene in her insanity.

“Who are you?” She asks, amused, as though he had not bound her with little effort only a short while ago.

“I am Loki of Asgard,” he says, glaring, his hands clenching into fists. “And before I am done with you, you will wish you had never been born.”

Narcissa laughs.

“Really, Lucius? The old gods? Is this a poor attempt at a joke? And claiming to be Harry Potter’s father? Really!”

“His highness Prince Loki killed the Dark Lord, Narcissa, with very little effort. I suggest you tell us the details of the ritual *now*.”

“You can’t stop it! The power is already inside Draco and the ritual is almost complete!”

“No need to ask her,” Severus interjects from somewhere to Loki’s left. “I’ve found the book. One potion to weaken the bond between soul fragment and the object, silk bonding ribbons to bind the horcrux to the subject, a spell to transfer the soul fragment, second potion to kill the soul fragment but retain the power, third potion to heal the damage from the basilisk venom and bind the power to the subject.”

“You fed basilisk venom to our son?!” Lucius shouts.

Furious, Loki stalks across to Narcissa and grips her by the chin.

“If my son dies, I will wipe you from existence,” he hisses. “But only *after* I have wreaked my vengeance upon you.”

Loki snarls one more time at Narcissa before returning to Tony and Hávarðr. He kneels next to them and lifts Hávarðr into his arms.

“We must go,” he instructs. The others draw in close, Severus and Sirius dragging Narcissa’s frozen body and Lucius clutching Draco close to him. Tony steps back into his armour and completes the circle, gripping him by the wrist. He didn’t even notice before now that it was shaking. With a deep breath, Loki transports them all back to the tower.

Almost immediately, he instructs Lucius and Severus in the direction of Draco’s room and leaves Sirius with Barton and Narcissa in the living room as he heads for Hávarðr’s bedroom. Tony, out of his armour once more, is not far behind. He hovers fearfully as Loki sets their son down on his bed. With gentle motions, Loki sets about pulling out the image of Hávarðr’s magical core. It looks pale and depleted, the colours faint and lacking in vitality, but Hávarðr is still alive, still there albeit unconscious and weak. When Loki looks to his forehead in search of the horcrux, the relief that sweeps through him is almost overwhelming. Its gone - that dark, malevolent magic is missing from where it used to be, with only small signs of trauma at the site.

“Its gone,” he murmurs, relieved. “The horcrux is gone.”

“What’s a horcrux?” Tony asks, voice uneven and afraid as he comes to stand by Loki and looks down at Hávarðr’s unconscious form. With a sigh, Loki disperses the image of Hávarðr’s magical core. Tony lowers himself to sit next to Hávarðr, drawing him into his arms carefully.

“A portion of another’s soul, fixed to an object to attain some kind of immortality. Dark Midgardian magic. An evil wizard used Hávarðr as a horcrux. I have been trying to find a way of removing it - but not like this. Not one that would harm Hávarðr,” he says, unable to help the emotion in his voice. Tony’s arms tighten around Hávarðr and Loki watches as the man he loves presses a series of tender kisses to Hávarðr’s head.

“But he’s alright though?” Tony pleads. Loki casts a quick diagnostic spell. Hávarðr seems to be recovering.

“He should be fine, but it will be a long night of keeping watch to make certain,” he answers.

“C’mon, kid,” Tony murmurs. “Don’t leave us now, not when we’ve just got you back. We’ve got so much to do, you and me. I gotta show you how to code and how to make a stupid bot like Dum-E. Maybe take you out in one of my suits - don’t tell mom, though, right? C’mon. Please. We gonna do everything we can, sweetheart. Everything. I promise.”

Loki’s heart breaks as he listen to Tony talk to their unconscious and wounded son. He wants everything Tony is suggesting and more. He wants for Tony and Hávarðr to have that - to spend time together as father and son, for Hávarðr to learn from his father.

“So what happened to the horcrux?” Tony eventually asks. Loki freezes, shocked out of his thoughts.

“Norns take that stupid witch,” he breathes. “*Draco.*”

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With Narcissa securely bound and under watch, and Loki tending to the Potter boy in another room, Lucius diverts his attention to the ritual book Severus had found. The page with this specific ritual on is dog-eared and marked with annotations in red ink in Narcissa’s delicate handwriting. He briefly wonders how long she has been planning this, but it is irrelevant. What is important is understanding what she has done and how to reverse it, or at least save Draco from the basilisk venom in his veins. A quick glance at the bed and he is comforted at the sight of Severus attending to Draco, checking him over with various diagnostic spells.

He turns back to the ritual, disbelieving as he reads it through for the second time. He cannot believe Narcissa ever thought this would be a good idea. The dangers presented far outweigh the benefits, and there is little to no evidence that this ritual ever worked. In the text preceding the ritual’s instructions, there is an oblique reference to an instance of this ritual being used, but no mention of the outcome. He thinks of his wife and how she had snarled at him, her face twisted into an ugly scowl. He wonders how long she has been hiding the madness he can now see in her eyes, much like the madness that had taken Bellatrix a long time ago. He ignores the thought that it could pass on to Draco as well.

“Phoenix tears in the third potion,” he murmurs. “But it says three hours must pass first. The venom could kill him long before then!”

“But to further interrupt the ritual could be worse,” Severus points out, leaving the bed to stand next to his friend. Lucius scowls in dissatisfaction.

“Where’s the spell? Perhaps we can transfer the soul fragment out of Draco into an object and destroy it like the others?”

Severus points at the text on the page and Lucius reads it several times over, wondering whether his idea would work. If he could transfer the soul fragment out of Draco and feed him the potion with the phoenix tears...

“W-where am I?” Draco suddenly asks from the bed. “Is that you, Lucius? My most loyal and favourite servant.”

Lucius glances at Severus in alarm before looking back at the bed where Draco is now sitting up, examining his arms curiously.

“Draco?” He asks, trying to keep his voice calm. Draco smiles, a terrible, evil thing that makes Lucius swallow in fear. That is *not* his son...

“Oh no, my dear Lucius. Kneel before your Lord,” the Dark Lord commands.

“The ritual worked,” Severus says evenly. His eyes meet Lucius’ and suddenly there are words in his head. *Go with it.*

“My lord,” Lucius says quietly, moving to the side of the bed and kneeling carefully.

“What ritual is this, that you have resurrected me into your own son’s body?” The Dark Lord laughs. “And to think dear Bellatrix was suspicious of your loyalty. Lucius, you have proved yourself loyal above all others, to sacrifice your son in such a way for our cause.”

“Anything to serve, my lord,” Lucius murmurs, hating the way the words taste in his mouth.

“And you, Severus, back by my side at last?”

“I never left, my lord. I only sought to steal secrets from Dumbledore that would aid our cause,” Severus says smoothly, moving to examine the ritual book once more. “But my lord, you must be careful. The ritual is not yet complete. You must take one further potion in another two hours. Until then you may feel weak and disoriented. I would recommend bed rest.”

The Dark Lord considers Severus for a few moments, and Lucius just knows he is trying to search for the truth in his friend’s mind. Lucius remembers the feeling. It is unnerving, having the Dark Lord in his head, and he can only imagine it will be even more so, now that the Dark Lord wears Draco’s face. He deliberately keeps his face turned downwards.

“You will tell me of what has passed since I last saw you,” the Dark Lord demands, gesturing impatiently for Lucius to stand. “And of Harry Potter - what has become of him since the so-called god appeared to save him.”

“Dead, my lord,” Lucius answers. “The ministry tried him for the murder of one of his classmates and found him guilty. Dementor’s Kiss almost six months ago.”

The Dark Lord smiles wickedly, distorting Draco’s face into something Lucius never wishes to see again.

“Then we have no opposition left save Dumbledore and he is an old fool easily dealt with,” the Dark Lord purrs. Lucius looks up at Severus, hoping his friend has a plan and the words appear in his mind.

*The soul fragment is not yet bound permanently. We can transfer it to another object to destroy.*

“Tell me more of this ritual. I have not come across it in all my research of soul magics,” the Dark Lord comments. Lucius watches as Severus moves around the bed and engages the Dark Lord in a discussion of the ritual, leaving out certain details. As they talk, Lucius studies the objects in the room curiously, wondering which would be the most appropriate to use in transferring the horcrux once more. He is just eying the books on Draco’s shelf when the Dark Lord calls his attention once more.

“Of course, whilst I am pleased by your loyalty, Lucius, you have not thought this through,” the Dark Lord points out, eyes narrowed as he considers Lucius.

“My lord?”

“Why would you think the body of a child is of any use to me?”

“My lord, I-”

“Do you think I can rule the Wizarding World in a body of one of *your* inferiors? In your *son’s* body, Lucius?”

“No, my lord, I only wished-”

“You will perform the transference spell once more,” the Dark Lord commands. Lucius stills, resisting the urge to glance at Severus as the Dark Lord plays right into their hands.

“Only this time, the body you will give me is yours, Lucius.”

Lucius just breathes for a moment as he takes in what the Dark Lord has demanded. He looks at his son’s body, stolen and corrupted through his wife’s foolishness, but really, if Lucius had not been so stupid as a young man, perhaps Draco would have been safe...

With a careful nod, Lucius glances at Severus briefly, allowing him to see into his mind, before turning to the Dark Lord.

“It would be an honour, my lord,” he utters.

The Dark Lord cackles in delight.

“Oh my dear Lucius, you have surprised me! I thought you would quail before this request, but your loyalty is beyond that of any of my other followers. Your willingness to die for the cause will not be forgotten. Now, give me your hands.”

Lucius clasps his hands over the Dark Lord's - *Draco's*, he thinks, *my son; this is for my son* - wrists and holds tightly as Severus binds their wrists together with the silk bonding ribbons salvaged from Narcissa's botched ritual. He looks into the Dark Lord's eyes as Severus begins to chant, seeing only the beautiful greyish-blue of his son's eyes and just smiles, not bothering to even attempt to keep the Dark Lord out of his mind. He feels the magic of the spell tingle across his skin even as the Dark Lord reads his mind and begins to shout in anger, trying to pull his hands away from Lucius as he realises what they are going to do. Then the burning starts, his palms and wrists covered in searing, blistering heat, but Lucius just holds on tightly as the Dark Lord begins to scream, his own hoarse voice joining not long afterwards as Severus continues to chant in the background.

The world around him grows dim and dark, but he does not fall truly unconscious, just slumps across the bed as Severus finishes chanting and cuts the ribbons binding Lucius to Draco. His head feels odd, too full and heavy and he can feel the Dark Lord's raging presence in his mind, trying to overwhelm his magic and soul and knows they do not have long. With what little energy he has left, he rolls carefully and reaches up to press a gentle kiss to Draco's forehead. Draco, who, aside from the burns to his wrists and fingertips, appears to be unharmed and sleeping, as peaceful as he ever looked.

“I love you, Draco,” Lucius says hoarsely. The clamour and rage in his head grows louder and Lucius knows he's losing to the Dark Lord. He holds Draco's burnt hand in his own and looks towards Severus.

“Do it, my friend,” he says quietly. Severus nods and the tip of his wand glows green.

## **Chapter 22: On Mourning and Reunions**

Tony watches as Loki seemingly pulls out books and glass vials and velvet pouches out of nowhere, arranging them neatly on the bedside table. Without so much as a word, Loki begins flicking through the pages of one of the tomes, pausing every now and then and glancing up at Harry's burned hands and wrists, before pulling a dissatisfied face and continuing to leaf through the pages. Harry is sleeping again, having only woken up for about an hour a short while ago. He had woken screaming, and it had taken a good ten minutes for both Loki and Tony to calm him down and to reassure him that he was at the Tower, in his own bedroom and that he (and Draco) were safe again. After he had calmed down, Harry had demanded to know what had happened and Loki had carefully explained what Narcissa had been intending to do. He had avoided the terrible outcome - the inadvertent resurrection of the Dark Lord and the death of Draco's dad - but Tony could tell that Harry knew there was something being kept from him. They had taken the opportunity to get some water and some food in him to aid his recovery, before letting him fall asleep once more.

“Are you sure I can't call anyone in?” Tony asks again, as Loki seems to settle on a page in the second book he'd brought out. Loki looks up from the pages and frowns a little.

"I'm not sure your Midgardian medicine would help," he answers. "Midgardian magic is rather stubborn when it comes to injuries. Magical injuries require magic to heal them; unfortunately I am not as knowledgeable in the healing arts as I would like - hence the books."

Tony shifts where he is sitting on the bed next to Harry's sleeping form. He looks down at Harry for a moment, still a little in awe that this boy is *his* son. His gaze drifts to Harry's arms, suspended above the covers in a golden glow of magic to avoid further damage to them. The sight of his son's injuries makes him a little nauseous and he wants, *yet again*, to hurry down to the containment unit where they've placed Narcissa and exact some kind of revenge. He swallows hard against the urge.

"But you can heal him, right?" Tony checks, unable to keep the worry out of his voice. When he looks over again, Loki's gaze is soft and gentle and it unnerves Tony. It reminds him of *Lucas*. Loki's arm jerks as if he is going to reach out, but he stops himself instead. Tony feels strangely bereft.

"I will do my best. His natural physiology will do much for his injuries - unfortunately Draco will not have the same advantage. I have less hope for Draco than I do for Hávarðr."

Tony rests his head against the headboard and sighs as he thinks of Harry's friend. He had woken before Harry and had not fallen asleep again quite as easily. Tony had not seen him since they had rescued the boys, but he had heard the shouts and the screams when Draco's godfather had given him the news. At least Draco's father's body had been moved before Draco had woken up.

"This is one shitty, screwed up situation," Tony says. "Kid's kind of lost both his parents in one day. There's no way his mom's going to be allowed to go free, right?"

"I would imagine not. As Draco's godfather, Severus will assume custody and I would imagine Narcissa will be sent to their wizarding prison - not a nice place, or so Harry tells me."

Tony thinks Loki is smirking slightly at that, but isn't entirely certain. Its strange, seeing parts of Lucas intermingling with parts of angry god he remembers from the invasion and unfamiliar elements of gleeful manipulative chaos that neither Lucas or the angry god had. Loki puts the book he had been reading down on the bed and reaches for one of the velvet pouches.

"Healing stones," he explains, pulling out two small, round, coarse stones and grinding them together between his palms. There is a soft glow of magic around his hands and Tony watches in fascination as Loki reaches out and begins to allow dust from the stones to fall onto Harry's wrists and hands.

"Will that-?"

"Not alone. There are some potions and pastes I must make that will help, but this will be a start."

Tony watches in silence as Loki continues to use the dust from the healing stones on Harry's arms. His mind wanders and he finds he does not really know what to think of Loki anymore. He is clearly not the god who invaded Midgard - the only glimpse Tony has seen of that was when a furious Loki faced down Narcissa - both when they had found the boys and then after everything, before she had been transferred to the containment unit. It had been terrifying - both her reaction and Loki's fury - though Loki's righteous fury on their son's behalf was strangely beautiful.

Before Loki had managed to get to Draco's room to help, Severus had appeared in the living room, expression weary and sad. He had explained what had happened - how the ritual had gone wrong and how Draco's father had sacrificed himself - and Narcissa, previously cold and calculated, determined and slightly crazed in her continued ramblings about the ritual and making sure her son was safe and powerful, fell silent. It had been eerie and had lasted quite some time before she had slowly turned her head to look at Loki, blue eyes icy and thoughtful. Her words in that moment had terrified Tony and he wanted to rush back to Harry's room, gather him up and hide him away where no one would be able to find him. She had threatened their son *again*, threatened to take *his* power, now that the horcrux was gone, to protect her son.

Loki's response was seared in Tony's memory. Tony, who had only ever seen the effects of magic and not felt them, who had been mostly disbelieving and wanting to find some scientific reasoning for *magic*, had felt the air in the room change suddenly. The air became stifling and electric, almost *buzzing* with some kind of energy as Loki had stalked forwards, glowing a threatening greenish-gold. The armour Tony remembered from the invasion - including that ridiculous helmet - had materialised around Loki's body and a wicked looking dagger had appeared in his right hand. Tony remembers the expression of hot fury on Loki's face as he had hauled her up with his free hand and rested the blade of the dagger against Narcissa's throat.

*"The only reason I did not slaughter you earlier was because you had information on the ritual. Tell me why I should not strike you down where you stand now and have done with you, hm?"*

The words had been low and almost gentle, mellow like honey, even as his grip and his eyes had been full of rage and hatred. Tony had not known whether to intervene or to stand by and let whatever Loki wanted to do happen. He had not known whether Loki really truly planned to kill Narcissa or not (not that he really had all that much problem with killing the woman who had hurt and almost killed their son; Tony supposed that was something he needed to discuss with his therapist), but when the woman's terrified silence continued and no answer was forthcoming, Loki had dropped her in disgust.

*"Know this, witch, I am sparing you for your son, who has already lost one parent today. I have no doubts he will likely lose you too, but not to death. Not at this time. Your justice system will deal with you."*

After Loki had finished, he'd stalked off to return to Harry's room and Tony had arranged for Narcissa to be moved to the containment unit in the basement of the Tower. Since then, they have both mostly been in Harry's room, watching and waiting for him to recover. The gentleness with which Loki treats Harry melts Tony's heart, even though he has never seen otherwise in the short time he has known Harry is Loki's son as well as his own. Even now



as he watches Loki finish mixing up a paste made of herbs and other ingredients Tony does not recognise and begin applying it to Harry's forearms, the gentleness takes his breath away. After a short while, he stifles the feeling, reminding himself of Loki's many deceptions and the low burn of his anger returns. He looks away from Loki.

"You are angry with me again," Loki comments. Tony refuses to look at him, and instead looks at their son.

"How can I not be?" Tony responds, threading his fingers through Harry's hair carefully.

"You have every right to be. I am not surprised, simply commenting that despite our recent truce and other events that needed dealing with, your anger remains."

"Harry is more important. When he was gone... I got kidnapped as a child a lot. Me and my dad never got on, and he and my mom would argue a lot too. But they'd always push their anger aside to find me when I was kidnapped. They didn't teach me much about how to be a parent, but that lesson is one worth remembering. No matter how angry I am with you, Harry is more important," Tony explains. He feels the bed dip and looks up to see Loki sitting on the other side of Harry.

"Thank you for doing that," Loki murmurs. "Thank you for trusting me."

"I don't trust you," Tony retorts. "I didn't trust you, I trusted your love for Harry. I don't know how to trust you - so don't even ask what you can do. I don't think I'm ever going to be able to trust you again."

When Tony looks up, Loki's mouth is open, but it snaps shut when Harry shifts between them and his eyes open carefully. Tony ruffles Harry's hair gently.

"Hey kid, how are you feeling? Your mom's been working on fixing your hands up."

Harry snuggles into Tony's side as best he can without use of his arms.

"Tired. Sore. Hungry, maybe?" He answers.

"I am sure I can find you some food, Hávarðr. And perhaps you will be up to some visitors as well? Your uncle wishes to see you, and I believe there are one or two others who want to assure themselves of your wellbeing," Loki stands carefully, making sure not to jostle Harry too much, before leaning down and pressing a gentle kiss to Harry's forehead. "I am glad you are okay, Hávarðr. I would be lost if it were not for you."

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Harry is sitting up in bed, his hands still suspended in front of him in some kind of magical field of protection, not really watching the tv show that's playing on the screen on the wall opposite. His uncle is sitting at the side of the bed, his feet propped up, seemingly absorbed in the show, but Harry has seen the glances Thor has been shooting in his direction every now and then. Thor's worried about him - they all are, given what Draco's mother had tried to do to them both. When he had woken earlier, his dad had finally told him the remainder of what

had happened, how the ritual had resurrected Voldemort in Draco's body and then how Mr Malfoy had sacrificed himself.

Harry hasn't been allowed out of bed yet, so he hasn't been able to see Draco, but that's really all he wants to do right now. He just wants to see his friend and make sure he's okay. Shitty events like this? He's sadly more used to it than he should be, given how the four years he'd been at Hogwarts for went. But Draco? Draco's never really experienced this (the thing with Buckbeak and being turned into a ferret do not count) and Harry has no idea how Draco must be feeling right now. He likes to think he knows a little, given that for most of his life he believed his parents were dead, but he thinks that knowing your parents and then losing one of them and one of them going mad is almost entirely different. All Harry has lost is the horcrux inside his head - not his parents.

"Uncle Thor?" Harry asks quietly. Thor looks at him with a smile.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Do you know how Draco is?"

Thor sighs heavily and shakes his head.

"I'm afraid I do not. His godfather has been spending time looking after him and my brother is currently tending to his wounds, but I do not know more than that. I am sorry," Thor replies. Harry shrugs.

"At least Snape is here. He'll make sure Draco's okay," he says. He tries to get back into watching the show on the tv - it's something to do with fairytales but stuck in a town in a world with no magic...? He isn't really sure - but his thoughts keep drifting to Draco. He wonders whether his *Móðir* will be able to heal Draco's hands or whether the difference in species will cause problems. Eventually, a knock on the bedroom door and his dad poking his head in pulls Harry out of his thoughts.

"Hey kid, up for another visitor?" His dad asks.

"Is it Peter?" Harry wishes he could use his hands to push himself up into a better sitting position, but he can't and just frowns in frustration as he ends up shifting and wriggling around in a failed attempt to sit up more. His uncle eventually reaches out and helps him sit up more against the pillows stacked behind him.

"Nope," his dad answers, entering the room. Someone else follows him in, taller than his dad, but with longer hair and looking a lot better than when Harry last saw him. He violently wishes he could give his godfather a hug, but he's bed bound and unable to use his arms.

"Sirius!" He shouts instead, feeling a grin spread across his face as his godfather comes closer. Sirius leans over and gives Harry a careful hug, mindful of his injuries.

"You do not know how relieved I am to see you," Sirius says gently as he pulls back. "Everyone believes you are dead - Dementor's Kiss for killing that Diggory kid. Dumbledore couldn't tell me otherwise. I am so glad you're alright."

Harry looks at his arms and then at Sirius who shifts awkwardly where he stands.

“Mostly alright,” he amends. “Well, you wouldn’t be James Potter’s kid if you weren’t getting into some kind of scrape!”

Harry winces at Sirius’ words and the expression on his dad’s and uncle’s faces.

“We’ve been through this, Black,” his dad warns. Sirius shoots an angry look at Harry’s dad and Harry closes his eyes in annoyance.

“James and Lily *died* for Harry, Stark. Where were-”

“Black, do not be even more of an imbecile than usual,” a new voice interjects and Harry almost jumps in surprise at the sound of it. Professor Snape lurks in the doorway, glaring at Sirius in disapproval. “Potter, it appears you are not dead, *again*. My godson wanted to know whether you are alright. As you are well enough to be entertaining this idiotic mutt, I shall inform him you are as well as can be hoped.”

Snape vanishes from the doorway and Harry looks after him, bewildered. After a moment, he looks back at his dad and Sirius.

“Sirius, James and Lily were my parents - they looked after me and died for me and I will always love them for that,” Harry says gently. “But Tony is my dad - my *real* dad - and he wants to spend time with me, to look after me like a dad would. Same with Loki. I’ve always wanted my parents back, and they might not be who I always thought they were, but I have them now, Sirius, and I want to stay with them.”

Sirius sighs heavily and sits down at the foot of Harry’s bed, resting a hand on Harry’s foot.

“I know, I know. Its just... I can’t believe your parents - James and Lily - never told me.”

There is an awkward silence for a while. Harry doesn’t really know what to say in the wake of all this; doesn’t really know what to say to his godfather who was so loyal to James and Lily, who wanted Harry to come and live with him.

“You could... um, maybe, I don’t know... stay for a while?” His dad awkwardly suggests. Harry pounces on the idea almost immediately.

“Yes! You could stay with us!” He says excitedly. Sirius smiles and shakes his head a little.

“Snape and I have a job to finish, and we need to do it quickly before anything else happens to any other Death Eaters decide they want to try to bring You-Know-Who back,” he explains. “But I will come and visit, Harry. I promise. As long as its okay with St- with your parents.”

Harry looks over at his dad hopefully, who shrugs.

“Not a problem with me,” his dad says, and Harry thinks its difficult for his dad to say that, almost as difficult as it was for his dad to offer Sirius the opportunity to stay for a while. He

is grateful though and Sirius appears to be grudgingly thankful for the concession. Harry smiles at them both and then looks at his uncle.

“Can you help me up, please? I want to go see how Draco’s doing.”

Thor nods and pushes the bed covers back, before carefully manoeuvring Harry to the edge of the bed, avoiding his arms entirely. Harry is able to stand on his own, but with his arms held in front of him by his *Móðir*’s protective spell, his balance is a little off. His uncle places gentle hands on his shoulders to steady him and they walk together out of his room and down the corridor. Harry ignores the hissed bickering between his dad and Sirius that begins as soon as he leaves his bedroom and instead focuses on thinking about what he’s going to say when he sees Draco. Thor knocks on the door quietly when they get there and Snape opens it promptly, rolling his eyes when he sees Harry. He lets them in though and Thor helps Harry settle at the opposite end of Draco’s bed. His *Móðir* is busy rubbing some paste into Draco’s forearms.

“And these ingredients are only found in Asgard?” Draco is asking, watching what Harry’s *Móðir* is doing very carefully. Harry wonders if he’s trying to distract himself from everything else. He wouldn’t be surprised if that is exactly what Draco is doing.

“Yes, like the healing stones, you will not find these on Midgard. Thor retrieved them for me from my old chambers in Asgard. I am hoping they will work as well for you as they have for Hávarðr, but you must remain still whilst they work their magic upon your wounds. The phoenix tears did much more than purge the basilisk venom from your body, but there is still some damage that remains,” Loki says, straightening up. He looks at both Harry and Draco sternly. “Don’t exacerbate your wounds, please.”

Harry nods in affirmation and watches as his *Móðir* gathers up his books, potions and other ingredients and leaves, pulling Harry’s uncle out along with him. Snape looms at the end of the bed, his gaze suspicious and narrow.

“Uncle Sev, seriously, go away,” Draco snaps, his neutral mood evaporating in an instant. Snape purses his lips and folds his arms across his chest in disapproval.

“I will leave you for now, Draco. But I will return in an hour as we have much to discuss about what is to happen now,” Snape concedes. He glares at Harry. “Don’t be an idiot, Potter.”

He sweeps out of the room, his black robes billowing behind him and Harry is reminded so sharply of potions lessons at Hogwarts that for a moment he almost believes he’s back in the cold, stone hallways of the castle, awaiting his doom in the form of cauldrons and ingredients and a perpetually disapproving professor. He shudders at the thought as the door closes behind his old professor.

“He’s always going to hate me,” he mutters. Draco’s small huff of laughter is faint and tinged with sadness.

“He’s all I’ve got now, Potter. Now that my father’s dead and my mother’s mad,” Draco says bitterly. “I’ve got to decide what to do with her, you know? Uncle Sev says it’s my decision

what we do with my mother. I don't even know what she was really trying to do - Uncle Sev can't tell me half of it because of some damned vow Dumbledore made him take."

Harry watches his friend. Draco's face is turned away from Harry and towards the window, his eyes tired and red and moving listlessly. His face seems paler than usual and Harry wonders whether Draco has gotten any sleep at all since waking up after the incident.

"*Móðir* and my dad told me," Harry offers. "Do you want-?"

Draco shakes his head firmly and continues looking out of the window.

"I know enough. I know my mother did some ritual, trying to *protect* me and ended up resurrecting the Dark Lord in my body. I know dad - father did something to switch the Dark Lord to his own body and then told Uncle Sev to kill him to stop the Dark Lord. I don't really know what you had to do with it, but that's okay. I know what I need to know, I think. Knowing more won't help."

"Draco-"

"It was the Dark Lord. And my mother. That's why dad - father is dead," Draco says. "Mother always said the Dark Lord would kill my father. But really it was her in the end."

Draco's face is still turned away from Harry, but Harry can see that his friend is crying. Silent, slow tears that slide down his cheeks, unattended. Harry wishes he could hug his friend.

"I'm sorry, Draco," he murmurs. He pauses for a moment, feeling utterly inadequate and unable to console Draco in any way at all. He doesn't really know what to say, what to offer. He just knows he can't make this any better for Draco, not at all.

"You know you can stay with us, right?" Harry offers after a while. "Dad won't mind."

Draco finally looks at Harry, giving him a watery smile. He shakes his head.

"I have to go home. There's a lot to sort out. With dad - father gone," Draco's voice cracks, "and mother either going to Azkaban or some centre for the magically insane, that leaves me in charge of the Malfoy estates and businesses. I have no other relatives that can step in. There is a lot I have to do now, and that starts with finishing my formal education."

"What about studying with me - with *Móðir*, like you wanted to? Surely you can-?"

"I *can't*, Harry. I can't. I have responsibilities as a Malfoy. To my father. To our family line. I can't do this anymore," Draco says tiredly.

"But Draco, I-"

"I'm sorry, Harry."

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Harry's hands and wrists are almost fully healed on the morning they say goodbye to Draco, Snape and Sirius. Snape has already taken Narcissa ahead to be held in a secure centre for the magically insane until Draco decides what he wants to do about his mother. Lucius's body has already been delivered to the funeral company back in Wiltshire in the UK, ready for his funeral ceremony and burial.

Preparations for it are underway, and from what Harry understands, it will be a grandiose occasion, where a lot of the Wizarding World's pureblood families will come to stare at the spectacle and laugh behind their hands at how Lucius Malfoy finally got what was coming to him. Draco himself will not be allowed any kind of real goodbye to his father at the funeral; he will be on show as the new head of the Malfoy family and will be expected to behave as is fitting for the head of an old pureblood family,. Harry thinks it is all bullshit, along with all the stupid responsibilities and expectations Draco now has to deal with. He wishes Draco could stay with them, wishes that his friend could mourn in peace and continue doing what he wanted - learning wandless magic and spending time with Harry and Peter.

Harry waits with his *Móðir* and his dad as Draco collects the last of his belongings and gives it to his godfather. Snape shrinks the trunk and pockets it, before turning Draco to face Harry and his parents.

"Thank you, Mr Stark, your highness," Draco says simply, bowing his head a little when he looks at Harry's *Móðir*.

"No problem, kid. Just let us know when you want to visit," Harry's dad says with a smile.

"I look forward to teaching you real magic at some point, not that useless Midgardian wand-waving," *Móðir* adds. Harry grins at Snape's scowl behind Draco. He looks at Draco, who is watching him sadly. The sad expression disappears after a little while, locked away behind a neutral, bland expression that Harry hates. He thinks he can still see the sadness in Draco's eyes though. He wonders whether his friend's mischievousness will ever come back.

"See you, Potter," Draco says after a moment's pause, extending his hand. Harry looks at it, one eyebrow raised. Draco shifts impatiently in front of him, waiting for Harry to respond, and Harry knows that Draco's thinking of their second meeting back when they were only eleven and Harry snubbed him. Harry snorts as he looks between Draco's extended hand and his friend's face, and as the hurt begins creeping in, he moves closer.

"You're an idiot, Malfoy," he says, pulling Draco into a tight hug. Draco's arms creep around him cautiously, as if he's never given a hug before and Harry makes sure to hold on extra tight. He thinks he can feel Draco's body trembling and wonders if he is crying again, but makes sure to act like he doesn't notice it.

"Write to me?" He whispers as he pulls back. Draco tries to discreetly wipe his eyes.

"Yeah."

After that Snape is all business, pulling Draco back and getting their (illegal) portkey to Malfoy Manor ready. Harry shares a quick hug with Sirius and reiterates the invitation for him to come and visit, but then they are all holding on to the old mirror and suddenly they

vanish. Harry stares at the spot where they were and sinks down onto the sofa behind him, suddenly feeling alone.

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*“This will not solve our problems, Tony.”*

*“You think I don’t know that? Hurry up.”*

*“And what if I wished to take my time with you?”*

*“Oh fuck you, you wasted that chance with all your lies. That I’m even letting you in here at all is a miracle.”*

*“And how much have you had to drink to make this bearable?”*

*“A couple. Dutch courage, you know?”*

*“I don’t know.”*

*“Well, when someone you think you love turns out to be a deceiving, manipulative, bastard liar maybe then you’ll understand the need for a little pick me up before getting screwed to the wall by them.”*

*“Charming.”*

*“Well, it brought you back for more.”*

*“Apparently it did.”*

...

*“This changes nothing, Loki. Nothing.”*

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